

What Everyone Needs To Know About God

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By

Don Stewart

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What Everyone Needs To Know About God

Table Of Contents

- Question 1 What Are The Attributes Of God? (God's Perfections)
- Question 2 What Are Some Important Things To Understand About God And His Attributes?
- Question 3 Should We Attempt To Categorize The Attributes, Or Characteristics, Of God?
- Question 4 In What Sense Is Our Knowledge About The God Of Scripture Limited? (The Incomprehensibility Of God)

Part 2 The Attributes Of God That Belong To Him Alone: God's Unique Characteristics

- Question 5 Does The Bible Teach That He Has Always Existed? (The Eternity Of God)
- Question 6 Was God Alone Before He Created The Universe?
- Question 7 Is God Dependent Upon Anything? (Independence Of God, Freedom Of God)
- Question 8 In What Sense Is God Perfect?
- Question 9 In What Sense Is God The Living God?
- Question 10 In What Sense Is God Without Limits? (Infinity, Immensity)
- Question 11 How Is God Greater Than Angels, Other Created Beings, Or Humans? (The Immensity Of God)
- Question 12 Is God Everywhere At Once? (Omnipresent)
- Question 13 In What Specific Ways Is God Present With His Creation?
- Question 14 If God Is Everywhere Present, The How Could Jonah Flee From His Presence?
- Question 15 If God Is Present Everywhere, Then How Can Unbelievers Be Separated From Him?
- Question 16 Is God All-Powerful? (Omnipotent)

What Everyone Needs To Know About God

- Question 17 If God Is All-Powerful Then Does It Mean He Can Do Anything? Are There Any Limits To What God Can Do?
- Question 18 What Does It Mean: God Is Holy?
- Question 19 In What Sense Is God One Essence Or Substance? (The Simplicity Of God)
- Question 20 What Does The Beauty Of The Lord Mean?
- Question 21 What Is The Glory Of God?
- Question 22 What Does The Name Of God Mean?
- Question 23 Does The Bible Say That God Puts His Word Above His Name? (Psalm 138:2)
- Question 24 What Does The Hebrew Term *Elohim* Mean?
- Question 25 What Does The Hebrew Term *Adonai* Stand For?
- Question 26 Why Is God Called *Yahweh*? (*Jehovah*)
- Question 27 What Does The Greek Word *Theos* (God) Mean?
- Question 28 What Does The Greek Word *Kurios* (Lord) Mean?
- Part 3 The Personal Attributes Of God:
 What Humans And God Have In Common**
- Question 29 Is God A Personal God?
- Question 30 In What Sense Is God A Father?
- Question 31 Is God Good?
- Question 32 Is God A Wise God?
- Question 33 Is God A God Of Truth?
- Question 34 Is God Love?
- Question 35 What Special Aspects Are There To God's Love? (Whom Does God Have A Special Love For?)
- Question 36 Is God Faithful?
- Question 37 Is God Righteous?
- Question 38 In What Specific Ways Does God Deal Righteously With Humanity?

What Everyone Needs To Know About God

- Question 39 In What Sense Is God Jealous?
- Question 40 Is God A Judge?
- Question 41 What Is The Wrath Of God?
- Question 42 Is God A Merciful God?
- Question 43 In What Sense Is God Patient?
- Question 44 Does God Have A Physical, Or Material, Body? (God's Spirituality)
- Question 45 Why Do Certain Passages Seem To Teach That God Has A Body? (Anthropomorphisms)
- Question 46 What Do We Say To People It Who Understand All Descriptions Of God In A Literal Manner?
- Question 47 Why Is God Compared To Animals?
- Question 48 Why Is God Compared To Non-Living Things?
- Question 49 Why Is God Compared To Human Relationships And Occupations?
- Question 50 Doesn't The Bible Say People Actually Saw God?
- Question 51 Can Humans Become God?
- Question 52 Can God Become A Human Being?
- Question 53 Did God Every Take A Physical Form Before The Coming Of Christ? (Theophanies)
- Question 54 What About Certain Passages That Attribute Human Passions To God? (Anthropopathisms)
- Appendix What Is The Proper Way To Spell And Pronounce The Name Of The LORD? (*Jehovah* Or *Yahweh*)

About The Author

**What Everyone Needs
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Part 1

Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!

Romans 11:33 NLT

What is the God of the Bible like? What are His characteristics? What can we know about Him?

The Bible describes the attributes, or characteristics, of God—the only God who exists. It alone tells us what the one, true God is like.

Unfortunately, human beings have created God in their own image. The god they create is one that reflects their own nature. God is manipulated to fit the needs of the person creating Him.

Add to this, there are many Christians that have a deficient view of God. They also manipulate the concept of God to fit their own desires.

The proper perspective is to find out what the Bible has to say about the character of God. His attributes have been revealed to us in Scripture. Therefore, it is essential that we examine the attributes or the perfections of God. This section introduces us to this topic.

Question 1

What Are The Attributes Of God? (God's Perfections) How Do We Discover Them?

What is the God of the Bible like? What are His attributes? What does the Bible have to say about the character, or nature, of God?

This is the first question that we need to address as we attempt to understand what the Scripture teaches about God.

The Word Attribute Defined

To begin with, we need to know what we are talking about when we use the word “attribute.” What do we mean when we speak of His attributes?

An attribute of God can be defined as “an essential and permanent characteristic of His nature.” They are also called God’s “perfections.” Therefore, when we use the phrase “the attributes of God,” we are referring to the characteristics of God that He has revealed to us.

Where do we learn of God’s attributes? How are we able to determine what God is like? A few important observations need to be made.

1. We Can Know Certain Things About God From Looking At The World He Created

We are able to know certain things about God’s attributes from looking at the world around us. Indeed, from looking at the natural world, we see that He is a loving Creator who makes all things fit perfectly together. In fact, we can see that He is a God of perfection when we examine the visible world. From the smallest particle to the largest star, we see design and purpose everywhere. This tells us something about the Creator.

2. We Need God’s Written Word To Know Specifics About Him

However, our knowledge of the attributes of the God of the Bible is mainly found in Scripture. In the Bible, God’s character is specifically revealed to us. Many things about God’s nature, or character, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the nature and extent of God’s knowledge, and God’s intimate involvement with humanity, can only be known from a reading of the Scripture. While the physical world gives us some insight into God’s character, it is the revelation in Scripture that explains who He really is, and what He is like.

Consequently, we do not assign these characteristics to Him—He reveals them to us. Therefore, apart from special revelation, we would know next to nothing about the character of God. This is why God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible is so important. Without it we would be lost.

3. We Do Not Have To Be Ignorant Of Who He Is

In fact, without God's revelation of Himself, humanity would stumble around in darkness. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the darkness in which the ungodly find themselves:

With the Lord's authority let me say this: Live no longer as the ungodly do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their closed minds are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him (Ephesians 4:17-18 NLT).

Fortunately, we do not have to stumble in the darkness. God has put us into the light as far as His character is concerned.

Jesus also emphasized this truth. He made it clear that we can only know the living God to the degree that He reveals Himself to us.

He said the following:

My Father has turned everything over to me. Only the Father knows the Son. And no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son is willing to reveal him (Matthew 11:27 God's Word).

God has been willing to reveal Himself to us so that we can know what He is like—as well as what He expects from us.

4. Human Reason Is Inadequate To Know These Things

Consequently, human reason alone is not an adequate way to understand the character of God. When left to our own ideas about the nature, or character, of God, each of us goes our own way. The Bible informs us that through philosophical reasoning humanity cannot understand God.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21 NRSV).

Unaided human reason ends up making God into the image that we think He should be. It does not tell us who He truly is.

In contrast, divine revelation is the only source that informs us of who the God of the Bible, in fact, is.

Thus, we must go to the Scripture alone if we want to know God's attributes—His permanent characteristics. There are no other sources.

Summary To Question 1

What Are The Attributes Of God? (God's Perfections)

How Do We Discover Them?

Studying the attributes, or the characteristics, of God is important for each of us to do. An attribute can be defined as a permanent characteristic of God.

It is crucial that we know what the God of the Bible is like. The question is: How do we discover this? How, and where, do we find out about these permanent characteristics which He has?

God's characteristics, or His perfections, can be seen to a limited degree in the world around us. From looking at the universe we note that God is a God of design and perfection. We see this everywhere that we look. Thus, we do discover some knowledge about God from nature—the world around us.

Although nature tells us something about His character, it does not inform us what He is really like. We really know nothing of His knowledge, care, and plan for humanity through what we can observe from nature. Indeed, it is impossible to determine any of these things from observing the natural world.

Human reason is also an inadequate means to know God's permanent characteristics.

Fortunately, we do have a trustworthy source that tells us many things about God. This is the written Word of God, the Bible. It gives us specific information as to what God is like, as well as what He expects from us.

From Holy Scripture we learn such things as God is a personal, loving God, that He is a Trinity made up of three distinct Persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that the human race, created in His image, has fallen from original perfection. These things could only be known from divine revelation. Consequently, we must go to the Bible to find out who the God of the Bible is, as well as what He requires from us.

In sum, to know the attributes or characteristics of the God of Scripture we must examine what He has told us about Himself. These truths are not discoverable on our own. A study of Scripture is, therefore, mandatory.

Question 2

What Are Some Important Things To Understand About God And His Attributes?

The permanent characteristics of God's nature are also called His attributes. It is crucial that we know what He is like. As we have emphasized, these characteristics can only be known from a study of Scripture.

There are a number of points that need to be remembered when we study the attributes of the God of the Bible. They include the following

1. We Need To Know Who God Truly Is

The fact that we recognize that the God of the Bible exists is not enough. It is important that we know who He truly is, and what He is like. This is not merely an academic question. We must properly understand who God is so that we can worship Him correctly. Indeed, our character and behavior will be shaped by how we view God.

2. The Attributes Are The Same For Each Member Of Trinity

There is another point which we must understand. These attributes of God are true for each member of the Trinity. Indeed, they equally describe God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if God the Father is holy, then so are the Son and the Holy Spirit. If the Son is merciful, then so are the Father and the Holy Spirit. In sum, each member of the Trinity has exactly the same attributes.

3. We Cannot Divide God Up Into Different Parts

Although it is helpful to look at each of the individual attributes of God that Scripture has revealed, we cannot divide God up into a number of different parts. He is a unified being. We should not think of His attributes as separate or distinct parts of His being. God's entire being is holy, righteous, all-knowing, everywhere-present, etc.

At times, God may display one particular quality. However, no one quality is independent of the others. Neither is any quality that He possesses preeminent over the others. For example, when God judges sin, He is still a loving God. When He displays His love, His holiness is still part of His character.

4. The Attributes Are Closely Related To Each Other

Another point which must be stressed is that each individual attribute of God is closely associated with the others. Indeed, they are all interrelated. When we treat each of these attributes separately, we can begin to comprehend the true greatness of God. Yet we must remember that these characteristics of God are closely related to each other.

5. We Should Not Set One Attribute In Opposition Against Another

It is also important not to place one of God's attributes in opposition against another. The Bible says that God is love, but His love does not come at the expense of His holiness, and His justice. In fact, the Bible never singles out one attribute as more important than the rest.

While some may be more prominent, we are not to attempt to attach relative importance to them—they are all important.

6. We Do Not Know How Many Attributes There Are

In addition, we do not really know how many attributes that God has. The only ones that we know about are those that are revealed to us in Scripture. There may be many more.

We simply do not know. Indeed, the God of the Bible has not revealed to humanity everything about Himself.

Consequently, we cannot fully describe God—even if we knew all of His attributes. Our understanding of His character is limited because of our finite, or limited, nature. It will always be this way.

7. We Have The Limitations Of Human Language In Trying To Understand God

There is also the matter of the limitation of human language in speaking about God. God is eternal, infinite, and invisible. We are unable to perceive Him with our physical senses.

Indeed, humans have no firsthand knowledge of beings that have these qualities. Yet human language can only relate to that which we perceive with our senses. Therefore, when we speak about God, we speak by analogy.

8. We Explain God's Attributes By Analogy

God has spoken to humanity by means of analogies. An analogy is something in one area of experience that is used to explain something in another area. For example, when we talk of God being a "Father" or a "Shepherd," we are using analogies. God is not a Father in the same sense that we understand the word. The same holds true for any word we use of Him.

Yet there is some relationship between the terms that we use about God and the way we use these terms on a human level. This is because God created humankind in His image. The Bible explains how humans were created in the beginning.

We read in Genesis:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26 NRSV).

The God of the Bible has made humanity in such a way that meaningful communication is possible. Therefore, we can have some understanding, however imperfect, of His character and being.

Summary To Question 2

What Are Some Important Things To Understand About God And His Attributes?

The God of the Bible has His own unique attributes or characteristics. Believers in Jesus Christ want to know these attributes. Indeed, we want to understand the God whom we love and serve. It is therefore important that we understand certain things about them.

For one thing, we need to know who God truly is. Knowing that He merely exists is not enough. We need to know His character.

It is also important for us to realize that each attribute of God is the same for the three members of the Trinity. Thus, the Father does not have any characteristics which are unique to Him. In other words, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit possess exactly the same attributes.

Therefore, we must realize that God is a unified being. Though we look at His individual attributes we cannot divide Him up into different parts. Thus, the attributes of God are closely related to each other. Indeed, they are all interrelated.

Furthermore, we should not set one of God's attributes in opposition to other ones. Unhappily, this is often done. For example, we should not set God's love against His justice. God is both a God of love, as well as a God of justice. They do not cancel out one another or are opposed to one another. Ultimately, we do not know how many attributes which God has. While He has revealed a number of them in Scripture, there may be more than what the Bible discloses.

There are also the limitations of human language in trying to understand God. This is something else we must appreciate. Our knowledge of God will always be limited to some degree.

Finally, we must realize that all communication and explanations about God are done by analogy. God is not a Father, a Shepherd, or a Warrior. These analogies are given to us so that we can have something by which we can relate to. They give us a better understanding of His character but certainly they do not give us a complete understanding of who He is.

These things are all important for us to understand as we begin our study of the attributes or characteristics of the God of Scripture.

Question 3

Should We Attempt To Categorize The Characteristics, Or Attributes, Of God?

For convenience sake, those who have carefully studied the Scripture have divided the attributes or perfections of God into different categories.

A number of observations need to be made about this practice.

1. The Bible Does Not Divide Up God's Attributes

To begin with, Scripture does not make any division of God's attributes. Indeed, they are never categorized for us. Consequently, any division will be human-made, and this will only be for the sake of convenience. The result will be that we can better understand God's Person.

2. There Is No Agreement Upon The Division Of Attributes

Furthermore, there is no agreement among Bible-believers as to how the various attributes of God should be divided. Students of God's Word divide these attributes differently from one another.

Thus, there is no clear, or set way, in which to list His characteristics. This should make us cautious about how we categorize these various characteristics of God's nature.

3. There Is Much Overlap Between The Attributes

In addition, there is also much overlap in any division of God's attributes. Because we are describing a Person—God, there will be some characteristics of His person that fit into a number of different categories.

Therefore, categorizing them is not that helpful. Each description that we give must be understood in light of everything the Bible says about God's nature.

4. There Are Attributes That God And Humans Have In Common

Some divide God's attributes along the lines of those shared with humankind—such as love and personality. There are indeed a number of attributes that God and humans have in common. These attributes, that human beings have, reflect the divine nature.

5. God's Attributes Are Not The Same As Human Attributes

While God and humans have some attributes in common, God's attributes are not the same as human attributes. This is crucial to understand.

Indeed, there are only degrees of comparison. Humans have some knowledge, but God has all-knowledge. Humans can be present in one

place, but God is present everywhere. Humans have some power, but the God of the Bible is all-powerful. Humans can love, God can love. Humans can hate and God can hate. These attributes are not exactly the same. God's love is perfect so is His hatred of sin. Our love, on the other hand, is not perfect.

6. Some Attributes Are Unique To God Alone

There are a number of attributes that belong to God and Him alone. This includes such things as the fact that He has existed forever—His eternity, and that He is without limits—infinity.

Humans, as created beings, have nothing in common with certain attributes of God. He has always existed and has no human limitations. There is nothing we have in our experience to which to compare them.

Therefore, when we do categorize God by His attributes, we are doing it more the sake of our convenience, and for our understanding. There are not any hard-and-fast rules.

Summary To Question 3 Should We Attempt To Categorize The Attributes, Or Characteristics, Of God?

One of the ways in which we learn about God is by studying His individual attributes or characteristics. However, when we attempt to categorize the attributes of God there are a number of things that we must realize.

First, the Bible does not do this. It never attempts to place the various characteristics of God into categories. Hence, we are making up human-made categories. While this is not something which is wrong to do, we cannot assume that we can come up with some perfect list.

This brings us to our next point. There is no agreement among Bible-believers as to how the various attributes should be categorized. This illustrates the fact that we are not dealing with hard-and-fast categories. We categorize God's attributes for the sake of convenience. Individual Bible teachers will not always categorize them the same.

In addition, there is much overlap between God's attributes. Consequently, one particular attribute may fit into a number of categories. This further illustrates some of the difficulties we face when we categorize God's characteristics.

Some place these characteristics into two categories. They consist of the attributes that humans and God have in common, and attributes that belong to God alone.

Those perfections that humans and God have in common are not exactly the same. God's characteristics are perfect, while ours are imperfect.

Finally, there are characteristics that belong to God alone. Indeed, many of God's attributes can only be known through divine revelation. There is nothing in our experience to which we can relate.

This sums up some of the important things we need to realize as we begin our study of God's attributes.

Question 4

In What Sense Is Our Knowledge About The God Of Scripture Limited? (The Incomprehensibility Of God)

One of the key truths about God is His incomprehensibility. This means that our knowledge about Him is limited. This does not mean that we cannot understand Him at all. It merely says that we cannot fully comprehend Him.

Paul wrote to the Romans about the subject of the incomprehensibility of God:

Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! (Romans 11:33 NLT).

It is indeed impossible for us to comprehend either the decisions He makes, or the methods He uses to make them.

We read about this in the Book of Job. One of Job's friends said that God's does things which are beyond our understanding:

God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding (Job 37:5 NIV).

Indeed, His ways cannot be comprehended by us.

There are a number of important points we need to make about our knowledge of God. They include the following.

Our Knowledge About God Is Limited

Because we are human beings, our knowledge about God is necessarily limited. It is compared to seeing through a dim mirror.

Paul gave this analogy when he wrote to the church at Corinth. He put it this way:

For now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12 HCSB).

When Paul says, "then I will know fully," he does not mean that he, or any of us, will know everything about God. Indeed, the God of Scripture can never be fully, or completely, understood by our limited human minds. The fact-of-the-matter is that is God is infinite, and we are finite. Even the words we used to describe His character are limited by our finite understanding. We cannot fully understand even one of His attributes—let alone all of them. This is something which all of us must appreciate.

God Is Not Visible To Humans

Furthermore, the God of the Bible is not visible to the human senses. He is the “unseen God.” John wrote about this when He said:

No one has ever seen God. God’s only Son, the one who is closest to the Father’s heart, has made him known (John 1:18 God’s Word).

Therefore, our observations about God are limited to what He has told us about Himself. Indeed, we cannot see Him or observe what He is doing. We are not capable of doing this.

There Are Many Things About God That Are Beyond Our Comprehension

It is important to understand that there are many things about the character of God that are beyond our comprehension.

This is to be expected because the God of Scripture is infinite, and we are finite. The Bible lists the following things about God that humans cannot comprehend.

1. The Love Of God

The Apostle Paul wrote that the love of God surpasses our knowledge. He said the following to the Ephesians:

May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God (Ephesians 3:19 NLT).

We cannot fully understand the depths of God’s love for us. It is truly beyond our ability to comprehend.

2. His Thoughts Cannot Be Understood

The psalmist also said that we cannot understand the thoughts of the God of the Bible. In fact, he stated that they are without number:

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God! They are innumerable! (Psalm 139:17 NLT).

The innumerable thoughts of God toward us cannot be comprehended.

Isaiah the prophet records the Lord saying that we cannot comprehend His thoughts, or His ways. The Lord put it this way:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For 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 ESV).

God's thoughts are beyond our understanding. Therefore, should not try to understand what He is thinking, or why He acts in the various ways in which He does.

3. God's Greatness Cannot Be Comprehended

Human beings cannot understand the greatness of our God. We read the following in the Book of Psalms:

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom (Psalm 145:3 NIV).

The Lord is indeed the great God. However, we cannot begin to fathom His greatness.

4. The Deep Things Of God Are Not Understandable

Paul wrote about the "deep things" of God that are beyond our comprehension. He said the following to the church at Corinth:

But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his Spirit, and his Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God's deep secrets. No one can know what anyone else is really thinking except that person alone, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world's spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us (1 Corinthians 2:10-12 NLT).

The deep things of God cannot be understood by humanity. It is only the Spirit of God which can explain them to us.

5. God's Understanding Of Things Is Perfect

His understanding is so much greater than ours. The psalmist said the understanding of the Lord has no limit:

Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit (Psalm 147:5 NIV).

While our understanding of all things is limited, God's understanding, of all things, is absolutely perfect.

6. God's Knowledge Is Without Limits

The psalmist said that God's knowledge is too great for our understanding. Again, we read in the Psalms:

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You both

precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know! (Psalm 139:1-6 NLT).

His unlimited knowledge is compared to our finite knowledge. He knows all, but we know so little. Indeed, all of us are painfully aware of our limited knowledge.

7. God's Peace Is Beyond Our Understanding

The peace that God grants believers is also beyond our human understanding. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7 NIV).

While we can experience this wonderful peace from the God of the Bible, we certainly cannot completely comprehend it.

8. God's Power In Not Comprehended By Us

We are also unable to comprehend God's mighty power. In the Book of Job, we have the following testimony:

Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand? (Job 26:14 ESV).

It is not possible for us to understand the mighty power of God.

9. We Cannot Understand The Mysteries Of God

There are mysteries of God that we, as limited human beings, cannot understand. We also read in Job:

Can you discover God's hidden secrets, or are you able to find the Almighty's limits? {God's wisdom is} higher than heaven. What can you do? It is deeper than {the depths} of hell. What can you know? It is longer than the earth and wider than the sea (Job 11:7-9 God's Word).

There are certain mysteries that belong to God alone.

Consequently, we find Scripture informs us of a number of specific things about God that are beyond our understanding.

We Need Humility In Studying God's Nature

Since Scripture itself acknowledges that things about the nature of God are beyond our comprehension, we should approach the subject of the attributes of God with humility. There are so many things that we have to admit that we do not know.

Therefore, we must be careful about our speculations about what we think God can or cannot do, or should or should not do. The words of the Apostle Paul are worth remembering in this instance:

But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, “Why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:20 NRSV).

Consequently, we should never question God’s wisdom, or the decisions that He makes. He always knows best. We do not.

We Only Know As Much As He Reveals To Us

In addition, we can only know as much about God’s character as He chooses to reveal. Going beyond divine revelation is pure guesswork on our part. Scripture does not encourage such. Paul wrote:

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another (1 Corinthians 4:6 ESV).

We need to pay attention to the Scripture. When we attempt to say more about God than what has been written in Scripture, there is the tendency toward self-pride. However, the only certainty that we can have is when we rely upon what has been revealed. Otherwise, we have no certainty whatsoever.

We Can Know Him Personally

While we cannot fully understand so many things about God, the good news is that we can know Him personally! This wonderful fact is emphasized in Scripture. We read in Jeremiah:

Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV).

Personal knowledge of God is possible! This is the good news that the Bible proclaims.

Therefore, we must appreciate what we can know, and that which we cannot know, about God. We do indeed have our limits.

Summary To Question 4
In What Sense Is Our Knowledge About The God
Of Scripture Limited? (The Incomprehensibility Of God)

The Bible itself informs us that the God of the Bible is beyond our comprehension. He is incomprehensible in the sense that we cannot understand everything about Him.

Although we can know many things about Him, there are many other things we cannot know. What we do know about Him is based upon what He has revealed. Apart from God's revelation, everything else is guesswork.

Indeed, Scripture specifically says that we cannot understand things such as the knowledge of God, the love of God, the thoughts of God, the greatness of God, the goodness of God, the peace of God, the power of God, and the mysteries of God. Realizing this should certainly cause us to be humble.

Consequently, there should be humility when we examine these issues with respect to God's character. We can only know as much about God as He Himself chooses to reveal.

The good news, however, is that we can know some things about Him, as well as we can know Him personally! We can have a relationship with the Creator. This is one of the great themes of Scripture. Knowledge about God, and personal knowledge of God is possible.

To sum up, we need to understand the limitations of our knowledge of the Almighty. Indeed, there are certain things which we can know and there are other things which we cannot know.

Part 2

**The Attributes Of God That
Belong To Him Alone
God's Unique Characteristics**

There are certain attributes that are unique to the majestic God of Scripture. These characteristics belong to Him alone. Indeed, the God of the Bible has attributes or qualities which are unlike anything, or any being in the universe.

Attributes such as existing eternally, needing nothing to exist, being everywhere at once, and having all-power, are unique to the God of the Bible. The only way we can know that He possesses these attributes is by God revealing them to us in Scripture. Even then, we can only comprehend these perfections to a limited degree.

However, it is vitally important that we should have, to the best of our understanding and appreciation, a correct view of the attributes that make up the awesome God of the Bible.

This section will look at the various attributes that belong to Him, and to Him alone.

Question 5

Does The Bible Teach That God Has Always Existed? (The Eternity Of God)

Yes. The Bible teaches the eternity of God. This means that God has always existed. His existence extends endlessly in the past, and will extend endlessly into the future. There was not a time when He did not exist. In other words, He never came into being, and He will never cease to exist. Scripture says the following.

1. God Has Always Existed

The Bible emphasizes that the God of the Bible has always existed. This is a consistent theme in Scripture. The psalmist wrote:

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (Psalm 90:2 NIV).

He has been God from everlasting—there was never a time in which He did not exist. Before anything else was formed, God was there.

John wrote, in the Book of Revelation, that He, God, is the One who is the Creator. We find the following testimony of a mighty angel:

Then the mighty angel standing on the sea and on the land lifted his right hand to heaven. And he swore an oath in the name of the one who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and everything in it, the earth and everything in it, and the sea and everything in it. He said, “God will wait no longer” (Revelation 10:5-6 NLT).

God is the Creator of all things. The fact that He created everything shows that He existed in the beginning. Again, He had no beginning.

2. He Will Always Exist

Not only has God always existed, the Bible says that He always will exist. Scripture records God Himself saying this:

For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear, as I live forever (Deuteronomy 32:40 ESV).

The Lord Himself testified that He would live forever. Since He cannot lie, we can be assured of His eternal existence.

Isaiah the prophet wrote about the Lord claiming to be both the “first and the last.” The Lord declared:

Who acts and carries out decrees? Who summons the successive generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, am present at the very beginning, and at the very end—I am the one. (Isaiah 41:4 NET).

The Lord is both the first and the last. He had no beginning, and He will have no end. This is the testimony of Scripture.

In the New Testament, we read about the eternity of God. Paul the apostle wrote the following to Timothy:

Glory and honor to God forever and ever. He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen (1 Timothy 1:17 NLT).

There will never be a time when God ceases to exist.

3. He Is The Everlasting God

One of the names of God is *El Olam* (this means “the Everlasting or Eternal God”). We read about this in the Book of Genesis:

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and there he worshiped the LORD, the Everlasting God (Genesis 21:33 HCSB).

Even at this early time in history, it was understood that the Lord was the “Everlasting God.”

The Bible also says that God inhabits eternity. In Isaiah, the Lord says of Himself:

For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite (Isaiah 57:15 NRSV).

He is the One who inhabits eternity. Time does not limit Him.

4 He Was There In The Beginning

As far back as we go, God is already there. Scripture says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1 KJV).

At the beginning of all things, we find that God was there.

This same truth is recorded in the psalms. Before anything was created, God was already there. The psalmist wrote:

But I cried to him, “O my God, who lives forever, don’t take my life while I am so young! Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth and made the heavens with your hands. They will perish, but you remain forever” (Psalm 102:24-26 NLT).

God has existed from the beginning—He laid the foundations of the earth.

5. There Is No God But Him

The God of the Bible is the first and the last. No other God exists but Him. In Isaiah, we read of this:

This is what the LORD, the King of Israel and its Redeemer, the LORD of Hosts, says: I am the first and I am the last. There is no God but Me (Isaiah 44:6 HCSB).

There was none who came before God, and there shall be no God, or gods, who will come after Him. He is the first and the last.

6. He Is The Alpha And Omega

The Lord is also called the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. In the Book of Revelation, it says:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8 NKJV).

Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. By saying He is the Alpha and Omega, the Lord is stating that He is the Beginning and the End. Again, this emphasizes that He has existed eternally, and He will exist for all eternity.

7. He Is The One Who Is, Was, And Will Come

The Lord says that He is the one who is, was, and who is to come. We also read about this in the Book of Revelation:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Revelation 4:8 NRSV).

This is another way of emphasizing His eternal nature.

8. He Is The Eternal God

In the Book of Deuteronomy, He is called the eternal God. Moses wrote:

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27 ESV).

As the eternal God, He has always existed. Furthermore, He holds us in His everlasting arms! This is indeed a wonderful thought.

9. God Is The Great I Am: The Self-Existent One

God is timeless, the eternal I AM. When the Lord spoke to Moses in the burning bush, He revealed this about Himself:

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:13,14 NIV).

The eternal I AM is beyond the restraints of time. Indeed, He is not limited by time as are we humans. His realm is an eternal realm.

Our notion of time is bound up with the way in which the stars and planets move. However, God is the One who created the universe, and all that is in it. Hence, He is not bound by time.

10. Because He Is The Eternal God, Only He Knows The Future

Because God is not bound by time constraints, He knows what will happen in the future. We find Him answering the questions of the martyrs to certain events—before they occur. In the Book of Revelation, we read:

They called loudly to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge the people who belong to this world for what they have done to us? When will you avenge our blood against these people?” Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters—their fellow servants of Jesus—had been martyred (Revelation 6:10,11 NLT).

Consequently, God will always be in control of all events.

11. God Is Not Bound By Time

Space and time are a creation of God. Scripture speaks of events in the past, present and future. However, God has never been bound to time. The Bible gives this comparison:

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day (2 Peter 3:8 NRSV).

Time does not limit the Lord in any way.

12. We Can Only Approximate The Truth About God’s Eternal Existence

The idea that God inhabits eternity, but has His dealings in time, causes apparent contradictions in the mind of humans. This is one of the paradoxes in Scripture (two truths that are seemingly non-reconcilable). Yet, this is what the Scripture teaches. Consequently, we must accept it as true.

Conclusion: The Eternal Nature Of God Is A Comforting Truth

The doctrine of the eternity of God provides comfort to believers. Since God will never cease to exist, then neither will those who have put their trust in Him. We can be confident of our future because He will always be there with us.

Summary To Question 5 Does The Bible Teach That He Has Always Existed? (The Eternity Of God)

The Bible teaches what is known as the eternity of God. This means a number of important things.

First, the God of the Bible has always existed. There was never a time when He came into existence. Indeed, as the Creator, He has made all things.

Furthermore, there will never be a time when He goes out of existence. He has endlessly existed in the past and He will exist endlessly into the future.

The Scripture, in the Book of Genesis, calls Him the “Everlasting God.” At this early time in human history, the eternal nature of God was evident.

This same truth is echoed in the New Testament. When we go back to the very beginning, we find that God was already there. This is specifically said of God the Son, Jesus Christ. He was in the beginning with God.

The fact of God’s eternal nature is also made known by the claims that He is the only God which exists. There are no others. By definition, God has always existed.

The Bible also gives titles to Him that shows His eternal nature. This includes such designations as the Alpha and Omega, the One who was, is, and is to come, and the Beginning and the End. They all support the idea that the Lord has existed forever.

Because God has always existed and will always exist, He is able to know what is going to occur in the future. Not being bound by time, God is able to accurately tell us what will take place in the days and years to come. Among the many reasons that He is able to do this is that He is a timeless Being.

While God dwells in eternity, He can still have dealings with His people in time. While this truth is certainly beyond our comprehension, it is something which is clearly taught in Scripture. Thus, we are to believe it.

In sum, these truths about God provide comfort to those who are His. We can rest confidently in His promises because He will always be around to carry them out. Therefore, the doctrine of the eternity of God is one which gives much encouragement to the believer.

Question 6

Was God Alone Before He Created The Universe?

If there is only one God, as the Bible teaches, then how could He have any fellowship, or any personal relationship, before humanity was created? Was God alone for all eternity before He created angels, other heavenly beings, as well as the human race? If so, was He needy?

The answer is found in what the Bible says about the very nature of God's divine unity—the doctrine of the Trinity.

1. **God Has Never Been Alone: The Trinity Has Always Existed**

The doctrine of the Trinity recognizes that the one God has existed for all eternity in three eternal Persons—or centers of consciousness. They are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Although they are of the same essence, they are distinct in their Person. In other words, the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit.

2. **Each Member Is Conscious Of Other Two**

Each member of the Godhead is supremely conscious of the other two. Therefore, there was an eternal fellowship within the Godhead before any finite creatures were created. Therefore, God never existed in solitary aloneness. Rather we find that there was a blessed communion between the three members of the Trinity in eternity past.

When Jesus prayed to His Father, on the night that He was betrayed, He spoke of the love the Father had with Him before the world was formed:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24 ESV).

This shows that Jesus was conscious of God the Father. Before the world was created, God the Father and God the Son shared their glory. Jesus said:

And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was (John 17:5 NKJV).

This tells us that the Father and Son have always been aware of each other. This being the case, they had no need to love anyone else.

3. **God Has No Needs**

Consequently, there was no need, therefore, for the God of the Bible to create humanity. There was communication, love, and fellowship between the members of the Trinity before the creation of humankind. God, being complete in Himself, has no needs whatsoever.

Hence, since He is complete in Himself, there was no compelling reason for Him to create humankind. Consequently, for whatever purpose or purposes that He created the human race, it was not to meet some need, or something lacking in His character.

In sum, God was certainly not alone when He created the universe.

Summary To Question 6
Was God Alone Before He Created The Universe?

If God was the Creator of all things does this mean that He was alone before the world was created? If alone, would this not mean there was something lacking with Him? Perhaps He created humanity to meet the needs He had?

Such is not the case. Before any finite creatures were created, God did exist. Although God is a unity, He is a compound unity made up of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Trinity.

Each member of the Trinity is a distinct Person—or a distinct center of consciousness. While they are of the same essence, there are personal distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

From Scripture, we also discover that each member of the Trinity is always conscious of the other two. Therefore, God was never alone— seeing that there was love and communication within the members of the Godhead before humanity was created.

Consequently, there was no need on His part to create the human race. God did not need anything. Therefore, the reason for the creation of humankind cannot be found in something lacking in the nature of God.

Question 7

Is God Dependent Upon Anything? (Independence Of God, Freedom Of God)

No. God is independent of everything. This includes His creatures, and His creation. He needs nothing to exist. There are no restrictions upon His character.

While humans need food, oxygen, and water to exist, God needs none of these things. He alone is the self-existing one. God is free to do whatever He chooses.

This is also known as the “independence of God,” or the “freedom of God.” The Bible has the following to say about this important truth.

1. Only God Is The Self-Existing One: He Is Not Dependent Upon Anything

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He explained that He is the great, “I AM.” The Book of Exodus reads as follows:

Then Moses asked God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what should I tell them?” God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation” (Exodus 3:13-15 HCSB).

The Hebrew word for “Lord” sounds like the word for “I AM.” It may be derived from it, but the derivation is not certain. The point is that God exists by virtue of His own nature. He is the self-existing One.

Paul wrote something similar to the Galatians. He emphasized that the God of the Bible is God by nature. He said:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods (Galatians 4:8 NRSV).

He alone, is God by nature.

2. He Is The Source Of Life

The Bible also says that the God of Scripture is the source, or the fountain, of life. The psalmist wrote:

For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light (Psalm 36:9 NKJV).

The Contemporary English Version says:

The life-giving fountain belongs to you, and your light gives light to each of us (Psalm 36:9 CEV).

All life stems from Him.

3. God The Father Has Life In Himself

In the New Testament, we find a similar statement. Jesus testified that God the Father has life in Himself. He said:

For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself (John 5:26 NRSV).

God the Father has life in Himself.

The God of the Bible is the living God. In the Book of Joshua, we read Joshua saying the following to the people:

This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites (Joshua 3:10 NIV).

The gods of the other nations were not alive. Only the God of Scripture is “living.”

Speaking of Jesus, God the Son, the Bible says:

Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone (John 1:4 NLT).

As He has life in Himself, He was able to create all things.

We read in the Book of Revelation about the ability of God the Son, Jesus Christ, to create. The heavenly creatures testified:

Our Lord and God, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because You have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created (Revelation 4:11 HCSB).

All things exist because of God the Creator.

4. God Does Not Need To Be Taught

In the writings of Isaiah, we read about God’s knowledge—He does not have to be taught. The Lord puts it in the form of a question:

Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13-14 NIV).

The answer, of course, is that none have taught Him. As the One who knows all things, there is no need for Him to be taught anything.

Isaiah also wrote about God's knowledge. He records the Lord saying:

Who has done such mighty deeds, directing the affairs of the human race as each new generation marches by? It is I, the LORD, the First and the Last. I alone am he (Isaiah 41:4 NLT).

None can teach Him. Nobody!

5. His Knowledge Is Not Dependent Upon Anything

The knowledge of God is not dependent upon anything, or anyone. We read the following in the Book of Hebrews:

And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account (Hebrews 4:13 NRSV).

The knowledge that God possesses is independent of everything else. Nothing is hidden to His eyes. He sees and knows everything.

6. His Actions Are Dependent Upon No One

The actions of God are not dependent upon anyone. God created the universe out of no preexisting materials. Neither did He have any help with the creating process. The Bible begins by saying:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 KJV).

He spoke and everything came into existence.

Paul spoke of the God of the Bible, as the Creator, not needing anything. The Book of Acts records him saying:

The God who made the world and everything in it—He is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in shrines made by hands. Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things (Acts 17:24,25 HCSB).

These verses teach us a number of things about God.

First, He does not have to consult with anyone when He does His work. He makes His own decisions—He is dependent upon no one.

In addition, God does not need us, or our belief in Him to continue to exist. He is complete in Himself. He gives us life—we do not give Him life.

However, God's independence does mean that He is uncaring. He is concerned with His creation. He shows this concern by providing for humanity.

7. His Happiness Is Not Dependent On Anyone

The happiness of God is not dependent upon anything. He is able to bless believers with every spiritual blessing. Paul wrote:

How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ (Ephesians 1:3 NLT).

The one who is greater always blesses the one who is lesser. God blesses His people.

8. God Is Not Obligated To Anyone

God is not obligated to humanity unless He wishes to be obligated. He is not in our debt. Therefore, God does what He alone chooses. His choice is not determined by an obligation to anyone or anything. If He does something for us, it is because He chooses to do so.

We read in Job the Lord saying the following:

Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine (Job 41:11 ESV).

Everything is His. Therefore, He is not obligated to anyone.

The Lord Himself has said that everything belongs to Him. The Book of Psalms records Him saying the following:

For every wild animal in the forest belongs to me, as well as the cattle that graze on a thousand hills. I keep track of every bird in the hills, and the insects of the field are mine (Psalm 50:10-11 NET).

The Bible says that God is not obligated in any sense to humanity, unless of course, He chooses to be.

Conclusion: God Is Independent Of Everything

From the teaching of Scripture, we discover that God is truly independent of everything—He needs nothing and no one.

Since God is a Trinity, there has been everlasting love and communication between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In other words, God is totally sufficient in Himself.

Summary To Question 7
Is God Dependent Upon Anything?
(Independence Of God, Freedom Of God)

The Lord revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush as the self-existing One. This is known as God's independence. It can be illustrated in a number of ways.

First, God is the only entity in the universe that is self-sustaining. He is not dependent upon anything to exist. Everything else needs something outside of itself to exist. He alone is independent.

In addition, He is the source of life for everything. Everything owes their existence to Him. He is the Creator, while everything else is His creation. Again, this puts Him in a different category than everything else.

Because He is self-existent, He does not need to be taught—neither can He learn anything new. He has all-knowledge. His actions are not dependent upon anyone. He does not seek advice—He does not need advice. Also His happiness does not depend on anyone, or any single thing. He does not need anyone to love. Again, He is self-existent.

Neither is God obligated to anyone. He does what he pleases. This, however, does not mean that He is uncaring. Indeed, the Lord cares deeply for His creation. Everything about God speaks of total self-sufficiency.

Question 8

In What Sense Is God Perfect?

The God of the Bible is perfect. The Bible speaks of God's nature as being perfect, as well as His ways as perfect. The following conclusions can be drawn about God's perfections.

1. God Has An Absolutely Perfect Nature

To begin with, we find that God has a nature without any imperfections whatsoever. Moses wrote the following:

The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he (Deuteronomy 32:4 NRSV).

There is nothing lacking in the nature of God. This means that His character or nature is complete. There are no missing attributes.

2. His Ways Are Always Perfect

God's ways are also perfect. The psalmist wrote of them as follows:

As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him (Psalm 18:30 NIV).

Therefore, He is never mistaken about anything that He says, or does. Consequently, we cannot second guess any of His decisions.

3. God's Faithfulness Is Perfect

Isaiah the prophet emphasized that God is perfect in His faithfulness. He testified to this as follows:

LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You. I will praise Your name, for You have accomplished wonders, plans [formed] long ago, with perfect faithfulness (Isaiah 25:1 HCSB).

His faithfulness is without flaw—it is absolutely perfect. Whatever, He says, He will do. The God of the Bible is faithful.

4. He Is Perfect In All Areas

Therefore, God is absolute perfection in His character, in His ways, and in His faithfulness. In other words, there is nothing lacking in His nature or His actions. Human beings, on the other hand, are imperfect in our makeup and behavior.

Because God is perfect in everything, there is nothing lacking in His character—there is no attribute that He needs. He has everything necessary.

Again we find the great contrast between the God of the Bible and fallen humanity. He is perfect, we are imperfect.

Summary To Question 8
In What Sense Is God Perfect?

The Bible speaks of God as being “perfect.” This refers to complete perfection on His part. There are a number of ways in which the Scripture speaks of the perfection of God.

First, Scripture says that God is perfect in His character. This means that He has every attribute necessary. He lacks nothing, there is no attribute missing. We are also told that He is perfect in all His ways. This means whatever He does is always right. He never makes wrong decisions. The Bible also says that God is perfect in His faithfulness. What He says, He will do. He always keeps His Word.

Therefore, the God of Bible is complete perfection in every possible area. This is in contrast to humans who are imperfect in our nature, our actions, and our faithfulness.

Since God is perfect in all of these areas, then we can completely trust who He is, everything which He does, as well as every promise He makes.

Therefore, the perfection of God instills confidence in the believer toward Him. He is indeed an object worthy of our trust.

Question 9

In What Sense Is God The Living God?

The Bible says that God is “alive.” Among other things, He is known as the “living God.” There are a number of observations that we need to make about this wonderful truth.

1. The God Of The Bible Is Indeed Alive

Moses told the children of Israel that God of Israel, the One whom they served, is the “living God.” He wrote the following:

For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived? (Deuteronomy 5:26 ESV).

The God of the Bible is alive! This is in contrast to the various gods of the ancient world who were mere idols—things that had no genuine existence.

The prophet Hosea told the people they will be called the children of the “living God.” He made the following declaration about the Lord and His promises:

Yet the time will come when Israel will prosper and become a great nation. In that day its people will be like the sands of the seashore—too many to count! Then, at the place where they were told, ‘You are not my people,’ it will be said, ‘You are children of the living God’ (Hosea 1:10 NLT).

Again, the God of Scripture is living, not dead.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul also emphasized that the God of Scripture is the living God.

He wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9 HCSB).

Here again we have the contrast between non-living idols and the living God. There is no doubt that the Bible teaches that God is indeed alive.

2. He Is Alive In A Different Way Than Everything Else

Yet, He is alive in a manner that is different than anyone else. The basis of His existence is Himself. Jesus said that He has life in Himself:

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself (John 5:26 ESV).

This can be said of nobody else. Only God has life in Himself.

Indeed, God depends upon nothing outside of Himself. The Apostle Paul said to a crowd in Athens that the God of the Bible needs absolutely nothing:

And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:25 NIV).

The God of the Bible is not needy like we are.

3. He Is The Self-Existing One

When the Lord spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, He told Him that He is the self-existing God.

Scripture says:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14 NRSV).

God exists completely by Himself. He needs nothing.

Furthermore, He is not affected by anything else, unless He chooses to be affected. He alone could make the following statement:

I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all My will (Isaiah 46:10 HCSB).

He alone accomplishes His purposes. No other being in the universe, angel, any other created being, or human, could make such a statement.

4. He Is The Source Of Life

God is also the source of all life. The psalmist wrote the following:

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light (Psalm 36:9 NIV).

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

The life-giving fountain belongs to you, and your light gives light to each of us (Psalm 36:9 CEV).

Whether it be nature, the animal kingdom, or humanity, or spirit-life, He is the source of all life. Everything stems from Him.

5. He Is The Source Of Spiritual Life For Believers

For believers, God gives to them spiritual life in the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote the following to the Romans:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23 HCSB).

Spiritual life, which translates into eternal life, can be found only in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John says it is God who gives us eternal life. In his first letter, he wrote the following to the believers:

God has also said that he gave us eternal life and that this life comes to us from his Son (1 John 5:11 CEV).

God gives us life everlasting, and this life comes from God the Son.

In another place, John said that believers are children of God because of a decision by God and Him alone:

But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13 HCSB).

Those who receive Him become His children—part of His forever family.

Scripture makes it clear that it is only believers which have a family relationship with Him. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

All of you are God's children because of your faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26 CEV).

Unbelievers do not possess this type of life.

Paul also wrote to the Galatians about how we cry out to God as His loving children. He put it this way:

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6 NRSV).

We cry out to our heavenly Father in the same way a child cries out to his or her earthly father.

Therefore, the believer is related to the living God in two ways. First, He is the Creator, and we are His creation, Second, He is our personal Father, and we are His children.

Summary To Question 9
In What Sense Is God The Living God?

The Bible says that God is the “living God.” This theme is consistent throughout the Scripture. In contrast to the idols of the ancient world, the God of the Bible is alive.

However, we must understand that God is alive in a different way than anyone else. He has life in Himself—everything else has life given to them. God is the source of life for all things. He is independent of all things—while everything else in the universe depends upon something else to exist.

For the believer, there is another type of life—spiritual life. Just as physical life is dependent upon God, so is our spiritual life. We are His children by the fact that we have believed in Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Therefore, the Lord provides life for humanity in two areas. As the Creator, everyone has physical life—which is a direct result of God’s creative hand.

However, there is another type of life which is limited to the believer—spiritual life. We have this life through faith in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, not everyone has this type of life.

Question 10

In What Sense Is God Without Limits? (Infinity)

The Bible says that God is without limits. This is also known as His “infinity.” We can express His infinity in that He is not limited to either space, or time. The Bible says the following about God being unlimited.

1. God Cannot Be Limited In Space

God cannot be limited in relation to space. Indeed, King Solomon made it clear that God is not limited to one geographical place. When the First temple in Jerusalem was dedicated, he prayed the following prayer:

But will God indeed live on earth? Even heaven, the highest heaven, cannot contain You, much less this temple I have built (1 Kings 8:27 HCSB).

Solomon was aware that the Lord was not limited to that one small space in the Holy of Holies in the temple. Indeed, the entire universe could not contain Him!

The prophet Isaiah wrote of the Lord’s declaration of His infinity. He recorded the Lord saying the following:

This is what the LORD says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?” (Isaiah 66:1 NIV).

There is no house in the entire universe that one can build for the infinite God.

The martyr Stephen also emphasized the idea that God cannot be limited to a certain place. He said the following to a hostile crowd:

However, the Most High doesn’t live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple as good as that?’ asks the Lord. ‘Could you build a dwelling place for me?’ (Acts 7:48,49 NLT).

This again stresses the truth that the God of the Bible is without any limitations.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul spoke of God’s infinity. When he was in the city of Athens, He spoke the following to a group of people who met to discuss such issues. The Book of Acts records his words as follows:

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one

ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring’ (Acts 17:24-28 NRSV).

Paul emphasizes that the God of Scripture is the infinite Creator. As such, He needs nothing.

We also find that God is equally present in all parts of the universe. The Lord declared the following to the prophet Jeremiah:

“Am I a God near at hand,” says the LORD, “And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?” says the LORD; “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the LORD (Jeremiah 23:23,24 NKJV).

Therefore, the Bible teaches that there are no spatial limitations to the God of Scripture. Consequently, it is not correct to think of God as being present in space at all. All finite objects in the universe have a location. Indeed, they are somewhere. This, of course, prevents their being somewhere else.

However, this question does not apply to God. He is present everywhere. This separates Him from every other being—whether it be human or angel, or any other created being.

2. There Is No Limitation In Time For The Lord

We also find that God is not limited in relation to time. In fact, the Bible says that He will rule forever:

The Lord will reign forever and ever (Exodus 15:18 ESV).

Time does not place any constraints upon the Lord.

We also discover that Moses called Him the “eternal God.” He wrote:

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, ‘Destroy him!’ (Deuteronomy 33:27 NIV).

As the eternal God, He has no limitations of time.

Nehemiah spoke of the Lord being God from everlasting to everlasting.

He wrote:

Then the Levites . . . said: Stand up. Bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Praise Your glorious name, and may it be

exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You created the heavens, the highest heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the heavenly host worships You (Nehemiah 9:5,6 HCSB).

The Lord, Yahweh, is the everlasting God.

The psalmist also declared that God has been God from everlasting to everlasting; always.

He stated it this way:

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (Psalm 90:2 NIV).

This means that He always has been God, and that He always will be God.

Jeremiah the prophet called the Lord the true God, the living God, and the everlasting King. He made the following claim:

But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and eternal King. The earth quakes at His wrath, and the nations cannot endure His rage (Jeremiah 10:10 HCSB).

This is another way of expressing the fact that the Lord is infinite—without any limits.

John wrote in the Book of Revelation about the limitlessness nature, or character, of the Lord. He put it this way:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing (Revelation 4:8-10 NRSV).

God is unbound by time or space.

3. Infinity Is Not The Same As God’s Omnipresence

We must make the distinction between God’s infinity and His omnipresence. The infinity of God is not the same as His being everywhere present—God’s omnipresence.

Infinity speaks of the fact that there is no limit to His Person in either space, or time. He is unbound, without limits. While sometimes these terms are used interchangeably, there is a distinction between them.

4. God Is Personal

There is one final thing. We also need to remember that the infinite God is also a personal God. While He is without limits, He is also intimately concerned with His creation.

Therefore, it would be incomplete to merely describe Him as the infinite God—He is the infinite/personal God. This describes the God of the Bible.

Summary To Question 10 In What Sense Is God Without Limits? (Infinity, Immensity)

The God of the Bible is said to be “infinite.” This means that He cannot be limited by space, neither can He be limited by time. Indeed, there are no temporal or spatial limitations to God. Consequently, God cannot be confined to one geographic place. This was certainly understood by the biblical writers.

For example, when King Solomon dedicated the first temple in Jerusalem, he testified that the Lord was not limited to that small building. Indeed, the entire universe cannot contain His Person!

This truth is repeated elsewhere in Scripture. God is not confined to one particular area. In addition, it is also wrong to limit God to any one point in time. As space is no barrier for Him, neither is time. He inhabits eternity.

The infinity of God should not be confused with His omnipresence. Omnipresence means that He is everywhere in the universe at the same time. The infinity or the immensity of God means that He is not limited by space or by time.

While God is infinite or immense, He also is personal. We must never forget this when we describe His character. Therefore, it would be more correct to say that the God of the Bible is the infinite/personal God. This is the God whom we love and serve.

Question 11

How Is God Greater Than Angels, Other Created Beings, Or Humans? (The Immensity Of God)

One of the attributes of God is known as His “immensity.” This concerns the fact that He is greater than the other personal beings that exist—whether they may be angels, other beings that He created, or humans. This can be seen in a number of ways.

1. He Is The Creator, Everything Else Is Created

God is the Creator, while humankind, other created beings, and the angels are part of His creation. We are His creative work, but no one created God. The Bible speaks of God creating in the beginning:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 KJV).

The heavens and the earth is a way of saying the entire universe.

We also find that humanity is the result of the direct creation of the God of Scripture. It also says in Genesis:

So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27 NLT).

God made the first humans, Adam, and Eve. The same holds true for angels, as well as other heavenly beings such as the cherubim and seraphim—they too are created beings.

2. He Is Infinite, Everything Else Is Finite

Another contrast to humans is God’s infinity. God had no beginning, and will have no end. The psalmist wrote:

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (Psalm 90:2 NIV).

There has never been a time when God did not exist.

Humanity, on the other hand, is finite. There was a point in time when humanity the angels, and the other created beings, did not exist. The Bible explains it in this manner:

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7 NRSV).

Before the creation of the first human, there was no existence.

There is a great gap between the Creator and the created in this instance.

3. He Is Totally Self-Sustaining While Everything Else Is Dependent

God alone is self-existent—He needs nothing apart from Himself to exist. The Apostle Paul spoke of God’s self-existence:

Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:25 NKJV).

God is complete in Himself.

Paul wrote to the Galatians about God being God “by nature.” He stated it this way:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods (Galatians 4:8 NRSV).

The Lord alone is self-existent. He is, by nature, God unlike the false gods that the heathen worship and serve.

Furthermore, human beings have to depend upon many things to exist. Indeed, we find that the prophet Daniel told King Belshazzar that God held the king’s very life in His hands:

Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. . . . But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways (Daniel 5:23 NIV).

These examples testify to the differences between the Creator and the creation. We are limited, He is unlimited.

Thus, there is no real comparison between God and us.

Summary To Question 11 How Is God Greater Than Angels, Other Created Beings, Or Humans? (The Immensity Of God)

The doctrine of God’s immensity stresses God’s greatness above angels and humans. This can be seen in a number of ways.

God is the Creator, while humanity, other created heavenly beings, and angels are part of the creation. He made us but nobody made Him. There was a time when we did not exist, but there has never been a time when God has not existed.

Indeed, God is infinite while everything else is finite. In other words, He is without any limits when it comes to both space and time.

However, as we are all aware, we humans are limited to both space and time. We can be only in one place at one time. God has no such limits.

What Everyone Needs To Know About God

God needs nothing to exist. He is completely self-sufficient. Everything else in the created universe has to depend upon something else to exist. Again, the difference is huge.

Consequently, there is a great gulf between the Creator and His personal creation, human beings, cherubim and seraphim, and angels. This is what is meant by the “immensity of God.”

Question 12

Is God Everywhere At Once? (Omnipresent)

The Bible teaches that God is everywhere present or omnipresent. In every place in the universe God is present. He is not limited by space. The psalmist wrote:

I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night--but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you (Psalm 137:7-12 NLT).

Notice that David said that God's presence couldn't be eluded through space (verse 8), speed (verse 9), or darkness (verse 12). In other words, nothing in the universe can hide a person from God.

The following things need to be said about God's omnipresence.

1. **God Is Everywhere Present In Heaven And Earth At The Same Time**

Scripture testifies that God is present in both heaven and earth at the same time. We read the following in Deuteronomy:

So remember this and keep it firmly in mind: The LORD is God both in heaven and on earth, and there is no other god! (Deuteronomy 4:39 NLT).

This is a testimony to the omnipresence of the Lord.

In Jericho, Rahab the prostitute acknowledged that the Lord, the God of Israel, was present in both the heaven and the earth. She gave the following testimony to the spies that visited Jericho:

When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below (Joshua 2:11 NIV).

At this early date in history, it was realized that the God of Israel was unlike all the other gods of the ancient world. He is Lord of all.

In Proverbs, we read about God's presence being everywhere:

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good (Proverbs 15:3 NKJV).

God is thus present everywhere. Nothing escapes His notice.

Isaiah records the Lord saying that it is not necessary to build a place for Him to live. This is because His existence is everywhere:

This is what the LORD says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple as good as that? Could you build a dwelling place for me?” (Isaiah 66:1 NLT).

While God is everywhere throughout the universe, He is not part of it. Indeed, He has an existence which is distinct from the material universe.

2. God’s Form Is Not Spread Out All Over The Universe

God is present everywhere. This is not to say that God’s form is spread out so that parts of Him exist in every location. Indeed, He should not be thought of in terms of space.

God is spirit, He has no physical form. He is present everywhere in that everything is immediately in His presence. At the same time, He is fully present everywhere in the universe. No one can hide from Him, and nothing escapes His notice. He sees everything that occurs.

The idea that God is everywhere present is not the same as pantheism—the belief that God is the same as the universe. Pantheism equates God and the universe. The doctrine of God’s omnipresence says that He is present everywhere in the universe—not that He is the universe.

3. Nobody Can Hide From God

The prophet Amos records God as saying that no one can hide from Him or His presence. He wrote the following words:

Even if they dig down to the place of the dead, I will reach down and pull them up. Even if they climb up into the heavens, I will bring them down. Even if they hide at the very top of Mount Carmel, I will search them out and capture them. Even if they hide at the bottom of the ocean, I will send the great sea serpent after them to bite and destroy them (Amos 9:2,3 NLT).

This is quite a statement from Amos. God is everywhere. Indeed, from the top of Mt. Carmel to the bottom of the ocean, God is there.

In the Book of Jeremiah, God makes a direct statement about His presence being everywhere. The Lord said:

I am everywhere—both near and far, in heaven and on earth. There are no secret places where you can hide from me (Jeremiah 23:23,24 CEV).

Therefore, it is worthless to attempt to hide from God.

4. People Do Not Get Away With Their Sin

Since nobody can hide from God—sin is never hidden. The Bible makes it clear that God exposes sin. There are a number of accounts of this in Scripture where God brought to light certain sins.

For example, when Adam and Eve committed the first in the Garden of Eden, God immediately brought it out into the open. They did not get away with their rebellion.

When one of the Israelites named Achan took some of the spoils from the victory at Jericho, he was exposed and harshly judged. He could not get away with his sin. His sin was exposed for all to see.

The same holds true for King David who was a murderer and adulterer. Although he was called a man after God's own heart, God sternly judged him for his sin.

In the New Testament, God judged the couple Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the apostles. Indeed, their sin cost them their lives.

The point is clear. Nothing escapes God's notice and sin will be judged.

5. God Is Aware Of Everyone Whether They Know It Or Not

His presence is with all creatures—even though they may not be aware of it. The Bible is clear that there is no place in the universe that is away from God's presence. His presence is everywhere. In Genesis, we read the following:

Wherever you go, I will watch over you, then later I will bring you back to this land. I won't leave you—I will do all I have promised. Jacob woke up suddenly and thought, "The Lord is in this place, and I didn't even know it" (Genesis 28:15,16 CEV).

This is an interesting observation by Jacob. He said that the Lord was in that place—though he did not even know it.

The Bible speaks of people being away from God's presence. In this sense, the word presence means the place of blessings—since nobody can go to a place which is unreachable to the Lord:

Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden (Genesis 4:16 ESV).

God protected Cain even though he was unaware of this protection.

Believers are told that they were once living apart from Christ. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said the following:

In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from God's people, Israel, and you did not know the promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope (Ephesians 2:12 NLT).

However, God was always aware of our every move even though we did not realize it. We may have lived apart from Him, but He still knew everything about us.

6. God Is Present With His People In A Special Way

The Bible says that God is present with His own people in a special way. The last words of Jesus to His people testify to this. Matthew records it as follows:

Jesus came to them and said: I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world (Matthew 28:18-20 CEV).

The fact that God is everywhere present is a constant source of comfort for believers. Wherever the believer may go, they will find themselves in the protection of God's presence. There is no place where a believer can get away from God's reach. His presence may be experienced at any time, and at any place. God has promised the believer that He is with them always.

We read these comforting words in the writings of the prophet Isaiah:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze (Isaiah 43:2 NIV).

Wherever we go, He will be with us.

7. The Lord Will Never Leave Us

In the Book of Hebrews, we are told that the Lord will always be with us. Indeed, it says that he will never leave us or forsake us:

Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5 NLT).

This is a promise in which believers can cling to.

8. The Father And Son Will Be With Those Who Believe

Jesus told His disciples that the Father and Son would be with those who believe. John records the following words:

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23 ESV).

God the Father and God the Son will make their home with those who believe in Jesus Christ.

9. Our Bodies Belong To The Lord

The Apostle Paul told the church at Corinth that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. He wrote:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own (1 Corinthians 6:19 ESV).

The Lord has made His home with those who believe.

10. The Lord Is Always With Us

In the famous twenty-third Psalm, King David acknowledged that the Lord was always going to be with him. He wrote:

The LORD is my shepherd. I am never in need. . . Even though I walk through the dark valley of death, because you are with me, I fear no harm. Your rod and your staff give me courage (Psalm 23:1,4 God’s Word).

Believers are aware of His presence. Consequently, we can rely on the promise that He will be present with us. The psalmist wrote:

I know the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me (Psalm 16:8 NLT)

Knowing that the Lord is always with us gives us tremendous confidence.

11. The Lord Protects His Own

The Lord Himself has promised to protect those who are His:

Don’t be afraid. I am with you. Don’t tremble with fear. I am your God. I will make you strong, as I protect you with my arm and give you victories (Isaiah 41:10 CEV).

We are not to fear because He is with us.

The Lord also takes note of all of our tears:

You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book (Psalm 56:8 NLT).

The Scripture is clear. God is everywhere. Nothing escapes His notice. This is such a comforting thought for those of us who know Him.

Summary To Question 12
Is God Everywhere At Once? (Omnipresent)

The universe, that the God of the Bible created, finds the Creator everywhere. God is everywhere present or omnipresent. This does not mean that God is the same as the universe. It merely means that His presence is everywhere in the universe. There is no place that a person can hide, and no chance that a believer will out of His protective care. There are a number of important observations we should make as to what the Scripture has to say on this matter.

To begin with, the Bible says that God is present in heaven and on earth at the same time. This does not mean that His form is spread out everywhere in the universe—for God has no physical form.

Indeed, we need to stop thinking of the Lord in a spatial manner. He is present in the sense that He knows what is occurring at all times, and in all places.

Because God is everywhere present this means that nobody gets away with their sin. The Lord sees all! There will be no such thing as the perfect crime.

Scripture says that God is always present with believers—whether we know it or not. This is a comforting thought. God is always with us.

Furthermore, while He is present everywhere in the universe, the Bible says that He is present with believers in a special way. He has a special concern for those who have believed in Him.

The truth of God's omnipresence is comforting for the believer—for nothing can ever escape God's notice. He is always watching over us.

Question 13

In What Specific Ways Is God Present With His Creation?

The God of the Bible is everywhere present in the universe. Indeed, the Bible says that God is present with His creation in a number of specific ways. They include the following

1. He Is With The Supernatural Beings In Heaven

The Bible says that God is with the supernatural beings in heaven—the ones which He has created. We read the following account in the Book of Isaiah:

In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Hovering around him were mighty seraphim, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with the remaining two they flew. In a great chorus they sang, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty! The whole earth is filled with his glory!” (Isaiah 6:1-3 NLT).

Here in the throne room of heaven we find the Lord present with the seraphim—one of several types of supernatural beings He has created.

2. God Is Present In The Natural World

God is also present natural world. We read the following in the Book of Nahum about God’s presence in the elements:

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet (Nahum 1:3 ESV).

In this instance the Lord was working through the whirlwind and the storm. The Bible thus instructs us that God may use natural forces to accomplish His divine purposes.

3. He Is Able To Sustain All Things By His Presence

God is able to sustain everything in the universe by His holy presence. We read in Hebrews about the Lord’s sustaining power:

God’s Son has all the brightness of God’s own glory and is like him in every way. By his own mighty word, he holds the universe together. After the Son had washed away our sins, he sat down at the right side of the glorious God in heaven (Hebrews 1:3 CEV).

God the Son holds the universe together. Indeed, Scripture says that He holds it together by His mighty Word.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he emphasized the same truth. He said that God the Son, Jesus Christ, holds all things together:

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17 ESV).

He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

4. He Is There For Those Who Seek Him

God is ever-present for those who seek after Him. The Apostle Paul emphasized this truth when He spoke to a pagan crowd in the city of Athens:

His purpose in all of this was that the nations should seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us (Acts 17:27 NLT).

This is an encouraging truth. The Lord does not hide from those who seek after Him.

5. He Is With Those Who Are Doing His Work

The Lord is also present with those who are doing His work. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus gave the following command to His disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20 NRSV).

Jesus claimed that He would be with His disciples as they did His work. Indeed, He would be with them wherever they went.

6. He Is Present In The Life Of A Believer

The Bible says that God is always present in the life of the believer in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote the following to the Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20 NKJV).

Christ lives in those who have believed in Him.

Therefore, from Scripture, we find a number of specific ways that the Lord is with His creation.

Summary To Question 13
In What Specific Ways Is God Present With His Creation?

The Bible says that God is present with His creation in a number of ways. Scripture gives a number of examples of this.

For one thing, we are told that the Lord is present in heaven with the various supernatural beings which He has created.

We also find that God is also present in the natural world. The prophet Nahum spoke of Him working through the elements.

His unique presence is with those who seek after Him. Indeed, will be with them in a special way.

God is also present with those who are doing the work of the ministry. He will watch over them as they do His work.

Finally, He is present in the life of each believer. He is promised to always be with us.

These truths demonstrate that God's presence is everywhere in the universe. It also illustrates that He is a God who is personally involved with His creation. These truths should be of great comfort to us.

Question 14

If God Is Everywhere Present, The How Could Jonah Flee From His Presence?

One of the central truths of Scripture is that God is everywhere present. However, this brings up a seeming contradiction. If God is everywhere, then how could the prophet Jonah hope to flee from God's presence? We read in the Book of Jonah:

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:1-3 ESV).

Does this mean that Jonah thought that He could go somewhere where the Lord could not find him? Some people actually believe this is what happened. They think that Jonah had a superstitious view of the Lord. Once Jonah got on the ship, he thought that he could go to some place where the Lord was not.

However, such is not the case. Two things need to be emphasized when addressing the question as to what Jonah was fleeing from.

Jonah Fled From His Calling As A Prophet: Not From God's Physical Presence

The phrase, "away from the presence of the Lord" does not mean that Jonah thought that He could somehow escape from God's notice. The phrase has the meaning of Jonah running away from his calling as a prophet. Indeed, he was attempting to flee from the ministry that God had given to him.

In fact, the wayward prophet Jonah realized that he could not hide from the living God. He said to the sailors on the ship:

He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" (Jonah 1:9 NIV).

Jonah certainly knew he could not go to any place where the Lord could not find Him. Since God created everything that there is, there is nothing that escapes His notice.

The Contemporary English Version brings out the correct idea. It translates the first three verses of Jonah in this manner:

One day the Lord told Jonah, the son of Amittai, to go to the great city of Nineveh and say to the people, "The Lord has seen your terrible sins. You are doomed!" Instead, Jonah ran from the Lord. He went to

the seaport of Joppa and bought a ticket on a ship that was going to Spain. Then he got on the ship and sailed away to escape (Jonah 1:1-3 CEV).

This gives the correct idea of what these verses are saying. Jonah ran away from the Lord's calling—it was not His actual presence.

Hence, when properly understood, there is no contradiction. Indeed, Jonah did not have some primitive idea that God was limited to a certain area. He knew that there was no place on heaven, or on earth, where He could flee from the Lord.

Summary To Question 14
If God Is Everywhere Present, The How
Could Jonah Flee From His Presence?

Scripture says that God is everywhere in the universe. Indeed, God's omnipresence is one of the central truths about His character. Yet this presents a problem when we read the first chapter of the Book of Jonah.

The Bible says that the prophet Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. How could this be the case if God is everywhere present?

Some believe it shows that Jonah had a limited perspective of God. Indeed, he thought God lived in one particular area. Therefore, Jonah could flee to a region where God was unaware as to what was occurring.

However, this is not the case. The thought behind Jonah fleeing from God's presence was his fleeing from his calling as a prophet of God. Jonah did not think that he could go somewhere where God did not exist. In fact, Jonah clearly declared that he worshipped the God of heaven—the One who made both the sea and the land. He realized it was futile to flee from God.

Therefore, the statement that Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord does not have the meaning that he thought he could escape God. He realized that he could not. Jonah was trying to flee from his responsibility of informing the people of Nineveh of their upcoming judgment. God would not allow him to do this. Eventually Jonah reached Nineveh with the message of the Lord.

Consequently, when we look at all the evidence, we find no contradiction between the doctrine of God's omnipresence, and this statement in the first chapter of Jonah.

Question 15

If God Is Present Everywhere, Then How Can Unbelievers Be Separated From Him?

The Bible says that God is everywhere present in the universe. The psalmist testified that there is no place that a person can be away from God's presence. He wrote:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
(Psalm 139:7) NIV).

However, there are a number of statements in Scripture that seem to indicate that people can be away from God's presence. They include the following.

1. How Can God Be Separated From Unbelievers?

If God is everywhere present everywhere in the universe, then in what sense will unbelievers be separated from Him? The Bible says that unbelievers will be excluded from His presence. Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians about what happens to unbelievers:

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:9 NIV).

How can someone be "shut out" of God's presence if God is everywhere? Is this not a contradiction? In what sense can this separation occur?

There is more. The Scripture also speaks of people being far from God. We read about this in the Book of Proverbs:

The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29 NKJV).

How can God be far from anyone, including the wicked, if He is everywhere in the universe? This seems like a contradiction.

In the Book of Isaiah, we read about those who have been cut off from God.

Scripture says the following about these people:

But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore (Isaiah 59:2 NLT).

How can this be true? How can anyone be far from God, or cut off from God, if He is everywhere present?

2. God Is Present With Unbelievers In His Wrath

The answer to this is simple. We must have a proper understanding of the presence of God. The Book of Revelation describes how God can be present with unbelievers. We read of the fate of those who worship the beast:

That person will also drink of the wine of God's anger that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and sulfur in front of the holy angels and in front of the Lamb (Revelation 14:10 NET).

God will be present in the sense of His wrath. His blessed presence is what is missing in punishment. There is no relationship with God for those who are condemned.

In fact, we find that God is able to be present to punish sin wherever it may occur. In the Book of Amos, we read the following:

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: "Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape. Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good" (Amos 9:1-4 NIV).

God is present everywhere. Nobody will escape. Even in the grave.

God is even present in the unseen world of the dead. This is called Hades or Sheol. The psalmist wrote of this:

If I were to climb up to the highest heavens, you would be there. If I were to dig down to the world of the dead you would also be there (Psalm 139:8 CEV).

Thus, the Lord is present even among the unbelievers in the realm of the dead.

3. God Is Present In A Different Way With Believers

While God is everywhere present, He is present in different ways in different places. For the believers, He is present to bless them.

The psalmist wrote this. He said:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1 NRSV).

For believers, God's presence is a blessing.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote of God's special presence being with believers.

He wrote the following to the Corinthians:

Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17 NLT).

However, for unbelievers His presence is not the same. Indeed, His presence is there to judge them—He is not present to bless them.

4. The Wicked Are Far From A Blessing: They Are Separated From His Goodness

Consequently, when it says that the wicked are far from God, it has the idea of being far from God's blessing—not His actual presence. Therefore, the writers are not speaking in a geographical sense of distance, but rather a spiritual sense—they are far from His blessings because they have rejected His truth.

Consequently, we have no contradiction in Scripture when we consider these passages which speak of everyone in the universe being in God's presence, while other passages speak of some being away from His presence.

Summary To Question 15 If God Is Present Everywhere, Then How Can Unbelievers Be Separated From Him?

One of the central truths of Scripture is the omnipresence of God. Indeed, Scripture makes it clear that He is everywhere present in the universe. Nothing can escape His notice.

However, there is a seeming contradiction when it says that certain people are "cut off" from His presence or sent "away from His presence." How can this be if God is everywhere present?

The doctrine of God's omnipresence is not contradicted by the idea of people being banished from His presence. Being sent away from His Holy presence speaks of God's judgment.

God is present with unbelievers, but He is present in the sense of His wrath. Indeed, His judgment is upon them. However, His immediate presence is not with them. This is because they have no relationship with Him.

Scripture speaks of the wicked being far from God. However, this means they are far from His blessing. It does not mean that they are far from Him in a geographical sense. While God is present everywhere in the universe, He acts differently toward different people.

To the believer He is present to bless them, while to the unbeliever He is present in His wrath. Therefore, when we examine all the evidence and correctly understand the terms, we find that there is no contradiction.

Question 16

Is God All-Powerful? (Omnipotent)

When the Bible speaks of God, it speaks of Him as being “all-powerful” or “omnipotent.” The word omnipotent comes from two Latin words, *omnis*, meaning “all,” and *potentia* or *potens* which means “power.” Hence, the God of the Bible is the God of “all-power.”

He appeared to Abraham as the Almighty God:

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” (Genesis 17:1 ESV).

He is God Almighty, the all-powerful One.

The Book of Revelation also speaks of the Lord God being all-powerful, or omnipotent. We read the following description:

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!” (Revelation 19:6 NKJV).

Therefore, we find that Scripture says that God is all-powerful. As we examine specific passages, we find that He is all-powerful in the following ways.

1. God Is Free To Do What He Pleases

If He so desires, God is certainly free to do anything that can actually be done. Indeed, there is no limit to His power. At times, He uses people to carry out His purpose. We read about this in the Book of Revelation:

For God has put a plan into their minds, a plan that will carry out his purposes. They will mutually agree to give their authority to the scarlet beast, and so the words of God will be fulfilled (Revelation 17:17 NLT).

On the other hand, in the Book of Romans, it speaks of God accomplishing His purpose without the use of any other means. Paul writes:

So then, He shows mercy to whom He wills, and He hardens whom He wills (Romans 9:18 HCSB).

However, when we say that God is free to do as He pleases, this does not mean that He can do contradictory or evil things. Indeed, He can only do things that are consistent with His character.

**2. He Is Powerful Enough To Do Anything:
All Things Are Possible For Him**

God is able to carry out all that needs to be done. No one can tell Him what to do, and no one can stop Him from carrying out His perfect plan. Nothing from the outside can force God to do anything. There is no personage or force in the universe that is powerful enough to cause God to do anything that He does not wish to do.

There are a number of biblical examples of God doing the seemingly impossible. They include the following.

**Abraham And Sarah Conceived A Son After
Their Child-Bearing Years Were Past**

The Lord promised Abraham that his wife Sarah would conceive a son—though both she and Abraham were beyond the childbearing years.

He said:

I am the Lord! There is nothing too difficult for me. I'll come back next year at the time I promised, and Sarah will already have a son" (Genesis 18:14 CEV).

God said that nothing was too difficult for Him to do. Anything that can be done, God can do. In fact, this promise was literally fulfilled. The Lord miraculously enabled Sarah to conceive a son, Isaac.

The Destroyed City Of Jerusalem Would Be Rebuilt

Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord warned Jerusalem that it would be destroyed, and the people taken captive. However, the Lord also promised that the city of Jerusalem would be restored after being destroyed by the Babylonians. Jeremiah responded to the Lord's predictions by confessing His great power. He said:

Ah Lord GOD! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you (Jeremiah 32:17 NRSV).

Jeremiah said that nothing is too difficult for the Lord. Nothing.

We read the reply of the Lord to Jeremiah:

I am the LORD, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me? (Jeremiah 32:27 NLT).

He agreed. Nothing is too hard for Him. The city was destroyed as the Lord had warned, but as the Lord had promised, the people returned and rebuilt the city and the temple. Again, He was able to carry out His promises.

The Virgin Mary Would Conceive A Son

The Lord, through the angel Gabriel, promised a young virgin named Mary that she would conceive a son. We read the following in the Gospel of Luke:

Mary asked the angel, “But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she’s already in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:34-37 NLT).

As always, the promises of the Lord come true. She did conceive a Son, the Lord Jesus.

When Jesus grew to be adult, He also emphasized that all things were possible with God. We read His words recorded by Matthew:

But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26 NRSV).

Many things that are impossible for humans are possible for God.

The psalmist likewise testified of God’s mighty power. He penned the following words:

Come and see the fearsome things our God has done! When God made the sea dry up, our people walked across, and because of him, we celebrated there. His mighty power rules forever, and nothing the nations do can be hidden from him. So don’t turn against God. (Psalm 66:5-7 CEV).

Consequently, the Scripture testifies that God can do anything that He chooses to do. Nothing stops Him from doing as He pleases.

3. His Purpose Cannot Be Stopped

We also find that God’s plans and purposes cannot be stopped. Job said of the Lord:

I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted (Job 42:2 NIV).

Indeed, nothing which the Lord sets out to do can be thwarted.

Daniel the prophet recorded the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar acknowledging the power of the Lord—the God of the Bible. He said the following:

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35 NIV).

God sovereignly rules over the entire universe. As Nebuchadnezzar noted, nothing can hold back His hand, or question what He is doing.

In the Book of Revelation, we read these wonderful words of triumph when Jesus Christ returns to the earth:

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" (Revelation 19:6 NKJV)

There is no force in heaven, or on earth, that can stop God from doing what He wants to do. Absolutely nothing.

4. He Does Not Get Tired

The all-powerful God does not ever grow tired or weary. Isaiah the prophet testified as to this attribute of the Creator God of the Bible:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable (Isaiah 40:28 NRSV).

Nothing makes Him grow faint or weary.

Indeed, the Lord does not need to sleep. Consequently, the psalmist testified that the Lord is always ready to act:

Indeed, he who watches over Israel never tires and never sleeps (Psalm 121:4 NLT).

The Lord is not like humans. He does not get tired or weary. He never sleeps. He is always ready to act.

5. God's Omnipotence Is Seen In Creation

The omnipotence of the God of Scripture is illustrated in creation. By His will, God brought about the entire universe.

We read the following in the first verse of the Bible:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 KJV).

God created everything in the beginning.

Creation Was By Means Of His Spoken Word

The psalmist wrote about God's power to bring things into existence by His spoken Word. He declared the following:

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm (Psalm 33:6-9 NIV).

God spoke, and it came about. This gives us an insight into His mighty power.

We also discover this in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. Scripture describes the appearance of light in the following manner:

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light (Genesis 1:3 KJV).

He willed that light appear, and it appeared.

The prophet Isaiah wrote about God's power in creation. He said that the Lord calls each individual star by its name! We read:

Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out one after another, calling each by its name. And he counts them to see that none are lost or have strayed away (Isaiah 40:26 NLT).

The creation testifies to the mighty power of the God of Scripture. All one must do is to look around.

6. He Upholds All Things In The Universe

Scriptures says that it is Jesus Christ who upholds all things. The writer to the Hebrews put it this way:

He is the radiance of His glory, the exact expression of His nature, and He sustains all things by His powerful word. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. So He became higher in rank than the angels, just as the name He inherited is superior to theirs (Hebrews 1:3 HCSB).

Everything in the universe is sustained by the power of God the Son, Jesus Christ. He does this by His powerful word.

In another place in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is said to hold together all forces of the universe. Paul wrote to the Colossians:

He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together (Colossians 1:17 NLT).

All things in creation are held together by God's power. Indeed, it is God the Son who holds creation together.

7. He Has The Power To Save And Keep Believers

God's power is shown in His ability to save and keep the believer in Jesus Christ. Peter wrote about the believer being shielded by His power:

Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5 NIV).

God's power is there to save us, and to keep us saved.

We also read about Jesus' power to save and keep in Matthew. In speaking to His disciples He spoke of how all things are possible with God:

Jesus said to his disciples, "I can guarantee this truth: It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. I can guarantee again that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." He amazed his disciples more than ever when they heard this. "Then who can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them and said, "It is impossible for people {to save themselves}, but everything is possible for God" (Matthew 19:23-26 God's Word).

The Lord has the power, as well as the desire, to save and keep those who are His. As Jesus said, all things are possible with God.

8. He Raises Believers From The Dead

God's power was demonstrated when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. It will be also demonstrated when He raises the believer from the dead. Paul wrote to the Colossians:

And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power (1 Corinthians 6:14 NKJV).

It was the power of God which raised the body of Jesus from the dead—the same power which will raise us up some day.

Elsewhere, Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the great and mighty power of God. He again emphasized that it was God who brought Jesus Christ back from the dead:

I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power he used when he raised Christ from death and let him sit at his right side in heaven. There Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world and will rule in the future world as well. God has put all things under the power of Christ, and for the

good of the church he has made him the head of everything (Ephesians 1:19-22 CEV).

The Bible says that believers will be raised from the dead to newness of life because of the mighty power of the living God.

9. He Is Able To Do More Than He Actually Does

While the Lord has done many remarkable things, the Bible teaches that God is able to do many more things than He actually does. For example, John the Baptist said to the religious leaders that God could actually raise up stones as children of Abraham:

Do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our ancestor; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham (Matthew 3:9 NRSV).

Not only could God raise up stones as children of Abraham, Jesus could have turned stones into bread—if He so wished. At His temptation, the devil said to Him:

Then the Devil came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread” (Matthew 4:3 NLT).

Jesus refused to do it. However, the Lord did not deny that He could have done this—if He so desired. Christ did not do it because it was the will of God for Him to fast during these forty days.

Yet, He never said that this would have been something impossible for Him to do. Indeed, a miracle like this was something which Jesus was perfectly capable of doing.

The point is that there are an unlimited number of things that God is able to do—but He chooses not to do them.

This sums up some of the important truths about the power of the God of the Bible. As an all-powerful being, He can indeed do what He sets out to do.

Summary To Question 16 Is God All-Powerful? (Omnipotent)

The Bible says that the God of Scripture is all-powerful, or omnipotent. Basically this means that God is able to do anything that He pleases. There is nothing which is too difficult for the Lord. Nothing whatsoever.

However, this does not mean that God can do evil things, or things contradictory to His own character. God is able to do all things that are possible for Him to do. We must appreciate this as we understand what it means for Him to be omnipotent.

From Scripture, there are a number of things which we learn about His mighty power. We can summarize these truths as follows.

To begin with, as the all-powerful God of the universe nobody can stop His purposes. Indeed, He accomplishes everything which He sets out to do.

Since God is all-powerful, He does not get tired. Unlike us, He does not have to sleep or rest. He is always ready to act.

We see examples of God's omnipotence in His creation. Indeed, the Bible says that the universe was brought about by the spoken Word of God. He willed the universe into existence. In other words, He spoke, and something came from nothing.

He now upholds the entire universe by His mighty power. We are told that Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the One who keeps the universe together with His power.

God's power was also demonstrated when He brought Jesus back from the dead. This is a major emphasis in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus was raised by the power of the living God.

In addition, this mighty power of God will also raise believers from the dead. Our bodies will be raised immortal by Him.

The God of the Bible has the power to save believers in Jesus Christ—as well as to keep them saved. He exercises His power to do so.

Finally, the omnipotence of God also means that He can do more than He actually does. While there are an unlimited number of things which He could do, He does not choose to do all of them.

This sums up the all-powerful nature of the God of the Bible. He indeed is a God who can do what He sets out to do.

Question 17

If God Is All-Powerful Then Does It Mean He Can Do Anything? Are There Any Limits To What God Can Do?

The Bible clearly teaches that the God of Scripture is all-powerful. He is indeed the “mighty God.” But does this mean God can do anything? Can God destroy Himself? Can He make a being that He cannot control? Can God make two plus two equal five?

No, God cannot do what is logically or actually impossible. He cannot contradict His nature, or character. That is not within the realm of His power.

The Bible actually speaks of a number of things that God cannot do. We can summarize them as follows.

1. God Cannot Lie

There are limits to what God can do. For example, the Bible says that God cannot lie. Paul wrote the following to Titus:

In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began (Titus 1:2 NKJV).

God is not capable of lying. It is not possible for Him to do so.

The writer to the Hebrews said something similar. He put it very plainly:

God cannot tell lies! And so his promises and vows are two things that can never be changed. (Hebrews 6:18 CEV).

Lying is not even possible with God. He always tells the truth.

2. God Cannot Be Tempted To Sin

There is something else which the God of the Bible cannot do—He cannot sin. We also discover that He cannot be tempted to sin. James wrote:

Don’t blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn’t use evil to tempt others (James 1:13 CEV).

There is nothing anyone can do to tempt God to sin. He does not have this capability.

3. God Cannot Deny Himself

Scripture also says that the God of the Bible cannot deny Himself. Paul emphasized this truth when he wrote to Timothy. He said:

If we are not faithful, he will still be faithful. Christ cannot deny who he is (2 Timothy 2:13 CEV).

God can only do things that are in harmony with His character. Self-denial is not possible. This is something that cannot happen.

4. God Cannot Go Back On His Promises

God has also stated that He cannot go back on His Word. In other words, He always keeps His promises. The psalmist declared:

Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens (Psalm 119:89 NIV).

When the Lord makes a promise, He keeps His promise. It is impossible for Him to break a promise which He makes.

5. God Cannot Look Upon Sin With Approval

While God sees everything, He cannot look upon any sin in an approving way. We read the following from the prophet Habakkuk concerning this matter:

Holy Lord God, mighty rock, you are eternal, and we are safe from death. You are using those Babylonians to judge and punish others. But you can't stand sin or wrong. So don't sit by in silence while they gobble down people who are better than they are (Habakkuk 1:12,13 CEV).

While God sees all sin, He is not able to look favorably on any particular sin that people commit. He must do something about it.

Conclusion: It Is Important To Have A Proper Understanding Of God's Omnipotence

Since there are certain things that God cannot do, how then can He be all-powerful? Is this not a contradiction of terms?

The answer lies in a proper understanding of God's omnipotence. Omnipotence does not mean God cannot exercise self-limitation. God cannot contradict His nature, or the nature of things as they are. It is not possible for God to either lie or to die. Neither can He make two plus two equal five, nor can He make a square triangle.

The biblical God has limited Himself only to acts that are consistent with His righteous, loving character. Therefore, God's power is self-restrained. He cannot do evil, and He cannot do anything irrational. He cannot go back upon His Word.

He is all-powerful when it comes to doing things that are right, but He has no power to do things wrong.

This is the proper definition of God being all-powerful or omnipotent.

Summary To Question 17
If God Is All-Powerful Then Does It Mean He Can Do Anything?
Are There Any Limits To What God Can Do?

When we speak of God being omnipotent or all-powerful, we must understand exactly what that means. If not, we will have an incomplete picture of the God of Scripture.

To begin with, being omnipotent means that God is able to do anything that is consistent with His holy character. Nothing can stop Him from doing whatever He decides to do.

However, there are certain things which He cannot do. The Bible actually lists a number of specific things which God cannot do.

For example, He is not able to lie. This means the God of the Bible always tells the truth. Lying is not something which He is capable of doing.

Neither is God able to do anything sinful—He cannot personally sin. Again, Scripture says that committing a sin is impossible for God.

Furthermore, we are told that God is not able to deny Himself. This has the idea that He cannot deny His essential being—who He truly is.

In addition, God can never look at sin with some sort of approval. He does not “wink” at our sin. Instead, He judges it.

We also discover that God cannot do anything that is logically impossible. In other words, He cannot make a square triangle or two plus two to equal seven.

The fact that there are certain things which God cannot do does not limit His power. Indeed, the fact that He has certain self-limitations does not take away from His power and majesty. He can do everything that is holy and wise.

This explains the self-limitations which God has placed upon Himself.

Question 18

What Does It Mean: God Is Holy?

The Bible teaches that God is a holy God. What does this mean? How are we to understand the word “holy?”

There are a number of important things which we must understand.

Holiness Defined: God Is Unique From All Beings And Separate From All Sin

The idea behind the concept of holiness is “separation.” It comes from a word meaning “to separate or cut off.” There are two aspects to God’s holiness.

First, God is separate, or different, from all other beings. He is unique, one-of-a-kind. He has no like or equal.

Second, God is separate, or cut off, from everything that is sinful and evil. Indeed, He cannot tolerate sin. John illustrated this truth in figurative language:

This is the message he has given us to announce to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him at all (1 John 1:5 NLT).

To say that God is holy means there is no trace of evil in His character. In other words, He is completely pure and perfect.

The Bible says the following about the holiness of God.

1. Only God Is Holy

We find that only the God of the Bible is holy. Scripture describes Him this way:

For the High and Exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy says this: “I live in a high and holy place, and with the oppressed and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the oppressed” (Isaiah 57:15 HCSB).

His name, or character, is holy.

In the Book of Revelation, we read that the Lord alone is holy:

Lord, who won’t fear and praise your name? You are the only holy one, and all the nations will come to worship you because they know about your fair judgments (Revelation 15:4 God’s Word).

The Bible testifies that He is the “Holy One.” There are no others.

The demonic spirits acknowledged Jesus Christ, God the Son, as being holy. When Jesus was about to expel these demons, they said the following to Him:

“Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24 NKJV).

They recognized that Jesus is the “Holy One of God.” They knew who He was.

Because only God is holy, any people or objects that are said to be holy are described in this manner because God has made them holy—or set them apart.

Therefore, the term holy is applied to persons or objects that have some type of relationship with the Lord—they are specially set apart for His service.

2. Each Member Of The Trinity Is Called Holy

Since God is holy, it follows that each member of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, is holy. The Bible emphasizes this truth.

We find the Scripture saying that God the Father is holy. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus addressed Him in this manner:

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one (John 17:11 NRSV).

Jesus called Him “Holy Father.”

The Son is also called “Holy.” On the Day of Pentecost, Peter described Jesus to the crowd that had gathered as the “Holy One:”

For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave (Acts 2:27 NLT)

The innocent One whom they crucified was the Holy One.

The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is also “Holy.” Paul wrote to the Thessalonians with this description of the third Person of the Trinity:

Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:8 NKJV)

Therefore, it is important that we understand God’s holiness in light of His nature as a Trinity.

3. The Holy God Is Separate From Humanity In Many Ways

As we can imagine, God, being holy, is separate from humanity in a number of ways.

For one thing, He is separated spatially. He is in heaven while humans live upon the earth. This is one of the ways in which He is separated from us.

We also find that God is also separate from us in His nature and character. Indeed, God is perfect, while we humans are, of course, imperfect.

Holiness is an attribute of God that distinguishes Himself from His creation.

4. There Are Positive And Negative Aspects To God's Holiness

With respect to God's character, holiness has both positive and negative aspects to it. It consists of what God does, as well as what He does not do.

On the negative side, holiness consists of what God does not do. He does not look upon, or participate in, any sin. This is one aspect of His holiness.

On the positive side, the God of the Bible always does that which is right. This separates Him from all other beings.

5. Related Terms To God's Holiness: Righteousness, Justice, Wrath

When we speak of the holiness of the Lord, there are three closely related terms that must be understood. They are God's righteousness, justice, and wrath. We can summarize these important terms as follows.

God Acts Righteously

God acts righteously, or always does what is right, because He is holy. The Bible says that He acts righteously toward His creation. The psalmist wrote:

The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works (Psalm 145:17 NKJV).

Notice that He is righteous in all of His ways. He always does the right thing.

The Lord, because He is holy, acts in righteous ways toward humanity. The psalmist asked the Lord for His help:

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness (Psalm 31:1 NIV).

We can rest assured that He will act righteously toward us.

The prophet Jeremiah trusted that the Lord would act righteously toward Him. We read his words spoken to the Lord:

But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause (Jeremiah 11:20 NIV).

Jeremiah knew the God whom he served. He knew that He would be the “righteous Judge.”

The Lord always acts in a manner that is consistent with His holy character.

6. God Holiness Is Seen In His Justice

Another aspect of God’s holiness in action is His justice. As a just God, He vindicates the innocent and exposes the guilty. The psalmist wrote:

Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer—it does not rise from deceitful lips. May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right (Psalm 17:1-2 NIV).

His holiness vindicates those who are innocent.

7. God’s Holiness Is Seen In His Wrath

There is a “Day of Judgment” coming when God’s wrath will be upon unbelievers. Paul wrote about this to the Thessalonians:

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10 NIV).

God holiness is expressed in His wrath.

These three related terms must be understood in the light of God’s holiness. God’s holiness can never be separated from everything that we know about Him. This includes His judgments.

8. There Is A Tension Between God’s Love And God’s Holiness

Sometimes there is an unresolved tension between the holiness of God and the love of God. God is both holy and loving. We should not allow ourselves to overemphasize either of these attributes. If we put too much emphasis on God’s holiness, then we may see Him as a cold, uncaring Being.

On the other hand, if we overemphasize the love of God, we then run the risk of assuming that He is soft on sin, and would never judge anyone. Both of the extremes are wrong. Therefore, a proper balance is needed.

9. The Old Testament And The Holiness Of God

During the Old Testament period, God often emphasized His holiness to the nation of Israel. When the Lord spoke to Moses through a burning bush, He made it clear that He is a holy God, and that Moses was on holy ground:

“Do not come closer,” He said. “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then He continued, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:5,6 HCSB).

The fact that a Holy God personally revealed Himself to Moses, an unholy human, revealed the holiness of the episode. Indeed, Moses was told that He was standing upon “holy ground.”

The Lord reminded the people of His holiness in the entire sacrificial system. We read the following in the Book of Leviticus:

After all, I, the LORD, am your God. You must be holy because I am holy. So do not defile yourselves by touching any of these animals that scurry along the ground. I, the LORD, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God. You must therefore be holy because I am holy (Leviticus 11:44,45 NLT).

Twice in these verses the Lord tells the people to be holy because He Himself is holy.

The Lord is called the Holy One of Israel. The psalmist wrote:

I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel (Psalm 71:22 NIV).

This is one of the most frequently designations of God.

From the Old Testament, we find the following things about the holiness of God.

The Nation Israel Was To Be Holy Or Set Apart To God

The nation of Israel was to be holy, or set apart, because the Lord is holy. The Lord said the following to the people:

You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own (Leviticus 20:26 NIV).

They are to be holy, or set apart, because He is holy.

The leader Joshua told the people that they were to be holy, or set apart in their conduct:

Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins” (Joshua 24:19 NIV).

In this instance, their sin was in contrast to the holiness of God. The nation of Israel was to act in a proper way because they had a special calling to the world—to be holy as God is holy.

We also find that the Lord was to be their standard of holiness. The prophet Isaiah wrote about this. He put it in this manner:

But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness (Isaiah 5:16 ESV).

He alone is that standard for holiness. We are to follow that standard.

God Is Unique In His Holiness

No one can be compared to the Holy God of Scripture. We read the following in the Book of Exodus:

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11 NIV).

There is none, among the so-called gods, who is like the Lord, the God of Israel. He is unique in His character, as well as majestic in His holiness.

In First Samuel, we find the following direct statement about the holiness of the Lord:

There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God (1 Samuel 2:2 NIV).

Again we find the statement that the God of the Bible is unique in His holiness. There is nobody like Him anywhere.

God Is Unable To Look At Sin

Because He is holy, God is unable to look at sin. We read about this in the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

It says:

But your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God, and your sins have made Him hide [His] face from you so that He does not listen (Isaiah 59:2 HCSB).

The Lord turns away from those who are sinning. His holiness will not allow Him to look at sin, or listen to their prayers.

The psalmist emphasized that God cannot put up with any sin. He stated the matter clearly:

O God, you take no pleasure in wickedness; you cannot tolerate the slightest sin (Psalm 5:4 NLT).

Indeed, the Lord will not tolerate even the slightest of sins from any of us.

Personal Sin Must Be Dealt With

In another place in the psalms, the psalmist wrote about the necessity of dealing with personal sin before approaching God:

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Psalm 66:18 KJV).

Sin in our hearts will cause our prayers to remain unanswered.

We Are To Hate Evil

God's holiness demands that sinners are separated from Him. He cannot tolerate the practice of any evil in His presence. Believers are to be like God in His hatred of evil.

The psalmist wrote about this:

Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 97:10 NIV).

This passage should be meditated upon by all those who believe in the Lord. The Lord loves those who hate evil. We then, should ask ourselves, "Do we really hate evil?"

Believers Are To Worship In Holiness

The believer is to worship the Lord in holiness.

The psalmist wrote:

Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness (Psalm 29:2 NKJV).

We do indeed worship a "Holy God."

The Old Testament, therefore, has much to say about the holiness of the Lord. We should pay attention as to what it teaches us.

10. The Testimony Of The New Testament About God's Holiness

In the New Testament, we find the holiness of God also being emphasized. We can make the following observations.

There Are Direct Statements About God's Holiness In The New Testament

The New Testament directly speaks about the subject of God's holiness. Jesus addressed His Father as "Holy" when He addressed Him in prayer. We read the following words of our Lord on the night of His betrayal:

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one (John 17:11 NRSV).

The Father is indeed "holy."

Because God is holy, we too are to be holy. Peter emphasized this important truth.

He said that our conduct should be characterized by holiness:

Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct (1 Peter 1:15 NRSV).

We are to be like God in our attitude toward sin. Indeed, we should hate it. On the other hand, we are to love that which is good. Therefore, if we really love God, then we will seek to be holy in our thoughts and actions.

There Are Figurative Uses Of God's Holiness

The holiness of God is also used figuratively in the New Testament. In his letter, John compared God's holiness to light:

This is the message he has given us to announce to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him at all (1 John 1:5 NLT).

Light and darkness are compared. God is light—He is without the slightest hint of darkness. We are to mimic God in our behavior and be children of the light.

As A Holy God He Can Only Do Good

Because God is holy, He can only do that which is true and good. He is absolutely pure and sinless. God, therefore, hates sin and loves the good. In fact, it is impossible for Him to sin.

Jesus prayed the following prayer to God the Father concerning His followers:

Make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth (John 17:17 NLT).

There is nothing in the character of God that would have Him act in an unholy manner. Believers are supposed to follow His example.

God Always Keeps His Holy Word

The God of the Bible, the Holy One, has promised that He will never go back on His Holy Word. Paul wrote:

In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began (Titus 1:2 NKJV).

God's revealed Word, the Bible, tells us that He is perfect in all that He is. There is nothing morally lacking in His character. Indeed, the God of Scripture is the God of perfection. This means He cannot lie about anything but rather He always tells the truth about all things.

The Church, The True Believers Are To Be Holy

The church is made up of the true believers in Jesus. We are to be holy. Paul compared the believers to a building—a holy temple. He wrote the following to the church at Ephesus:

You are like a building with the apostles and prophets as the foundation and with Christ as the most important stone. Christ is the one who holds the building together and makes it grow into a holy temple for the Lord. And you are part of that building Christ has built as a place for God's own Spirit to live (Ephesians 2:20-22 CEV).

We are to be a holy people—a group of people which are set apart for the work of the Lord. This is the calling of the church.

Holiness Causes Believers To Be Sensitive To Sin

The holiness of God causes believers to be sensitive to their own sinful ways. We read the following account about Simon Peter:

When Simon Peter saw this happen, he knelt down in front of Jesus and said, "Lord, don't come near me! I am a sinner." Peter and everyone with him were completely surprised at all the fish they had caught (Luke 5:8 CEV).

Peter recognized his sinful condition in the presence of the Lord. He knew that he had failed Jesus. Like Peter, we too should be sensitive to the sins which we commit.

We Have A Holy Standard To Live By

Believers should act in a holy manner because the God of the Bible is holy. John the Apostle wrote of the necessity of believers to walk in the light:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7 NIV).

This means that believers are to be separate from evil and devoted to God alone.

The writer to the Hebrews also spoke of the necessity of living a clean and holy life. He put it this way:

Try to live in peace with everyone, and seek to live a clean and holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14 NLT).

We are to conduct our lives as those who are pleasing to the Lord, in holiness.

His Holiness Is Acknowledged In Praise

We find the holiness of God being acknowledged in praise. In the Book of Revelation, we read the following:

Each of the four living creatures had six wings, and their bodies were covered with eyes. Day and night they never stopped singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, the all-powerful God, who was and is and is coming!” (Revelation 4:8 CEV).

We praise the Lord because of His holiness.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament has a number of truths to teach us about the holiness of the Lord—as well as how we should act in a holy manner.

11. Everything Will Eventually Be Holy

There is one final thing which we should emphasize. When the Lord returns to the earth and sets up His kingdom, everything will be holy. The Old Testament prophet Zechariah wrote about this coming day:

And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “Holy to the Lord.” And the pots in the house of the Lord shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day (Zechariah 14:20,21 ESV).

Holiness will someday be the standard. What a wonderful day to look forward to!

Summary To Question 18 What Does It Mean: God Is Holy?

Scripture speaks of the holiness of God. There are two basic ideas behind the word.

What Everyone Needs To Know About God

First God is unique, one a kind. He is different from all other beings. Second, He is separate from sin.

Thus, we find that God alone is holy. He is perfect in His nature. His character is one of flawless moral perfection. As a holy God, He is unable to look upon sin. Because God is holy, He can only do good, never evil.

We find that holiness has a positive and negative side. On the positive side, He always does what is right. On the negative side, He is separate from all sin.

The Old Testament tells us much about God's holiness. Israel was to be a holy nation unto the Lord. Their behavior would set them apart from all other people.

The New Testament also stresses the holiness of God. He wants His people, the church, to be holy. Indeed, those who believe in Jesus have a holy standard to live by.

Eventually everything will be holy when the Lord returns. Until that time, we live in an unholy world. Yet, in doing so, we should do our best, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live a life of holiness as unto the Lord.

Question 19

In What Sense Is God One Essence Or Substance? (The Simplicity Of God)

The God of the Bible is a unified being. In one of the most important statements in the entire Old Testament, Moses wrote the following about God's essence:

Listen, Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! (Deuteronomy 6:4 NET).

God is one in number. This is also known as the "simplicity" of God. The idea of God's simplicity has to do with His essence. Although God is a Trinity, He is also a unity, one substance. This means that God is not composed of more than one part, or more than one substance.

A number of points need to be made about this idea of God's simplicity.

1. The Simplicity Of God Emphasizes His Self-Existence

The doctrine of the simplicity of God emphasizes that He exists without the need of anything else. For example, there were no forces that came together to form God.

By nature, He is a unified being. In other words, there are no "parts."

2. God Is Made Up Of A Different Substance Than Humans: He Is Spirit

While human beings are made up of matter and spirit, the same is not true with God.

Jesus said that God is spirit:

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24 NRSV).

God, as opposed to humans, is made up of one substance, spirit. Because He is spirit, we worship Him "in" the Spirit, or "by means" of the Spirit.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he emphasized that we worship God "in the Spirit or "by the Spirit." He said:

For we who worship God in the Spirit are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us (Philippians 3:3 NLT).

Worship of God must be by means of the Spirit—not by human effort.

Paul also wrote:

But the one united with the Lord is one spirit with him (1 Corinthians 6:17 NET).

We are one in the spirit with the Lord—if we belong to Jesus Christ.

3. The Essence Of Jesus Is Still Spirit

The Bible says that God the Son, Jesus Christ, became a human being. In doing so, He added something to Himself that He never previously had—a human nature.

However, He did not alter His absolute essence. Indeed, He is still spirit. Because the Son is Almighty God, He is also spirit in His essence. Consequently, His essence did not change when He became human.

In sum, the Bible emphasizes the God of Scripture is one substance—He is not made up of separate parts.

Summary To Question 19 In What Sense Is God One Essence Or Substance? (The Simplicity Of God)

The simplicity of God means that He is a unified being—He is one essence. Hence the God of Scripture is not composed of a variety of substances. In this sense, He is different from humans who are made up of matter and spirit.

Jesus Christ is not an exception to this truth about God's nature. As God, He took a human body while He was here upon the earth. Yet, in His essence, He is still absolute spirit.

The simplicity of God reminds us that He needs nothing else to exist, neither did He come about by a number of forces, or substances, being joined together. This reassuring fact will encourage us to worship Him as the unchanging God.

Question 20

What Does The Beauty Of The Lord Mean?

Scripture describes the Lord in a number of ways. Among them is the phrase the “beauty of the Lord.” The psalmist wrote about it in the following way:

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple (Psalm 27:4 NIV).

What is meant by the beauty of the Lord? How can we explain this characteristic of God? In what sense are we to understand Him as beautiful.

1. God Has Everything That Is Desirable In His Character

The beauty of the Lord can be defined as God possessing everything in His character that is desirable. Everything that is good and righteous has its ultimate fulfillment in the God of the Bible.

In another place, the psalmist wrote:

Do what the Lord wants, and he will give you your heart’s desire (Psalm 37:4 CEV).

The desires of the human heart can only be found in the Lord and His beauty. Only He has everything which is desirable.

We read in another Psalm about what the desire of our heart should consist of—God alone. The psalmist declared:

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you (Psalm 73:25 NIV).

This should be our heartfelt cry also. Our only desire should be for Him. The Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, expressed the same thought when he wrote to the Philippians. His heart’s desire was to personally know the Lord in every way possible. Paul wrote the following:

[My goal] is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Philippians 3:10 HCSB).

Our desire should be the same—to know Jesus Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.

2. His Beauty Is To Be Reflected In Believers

When believers act according to the commandments of the Lord, they reflect his beauty. Paul wrote to Titus:

Slaves must always obey their masters and do their best to please them. They must not talk back or steal, but must show themselves to be entirely trustworthy and good. Then they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way (Titus 2:9,10 NLT).

Our goal should be to make the Lord attractive to others.

Peter wrote the following to the believing wives about what true beauty consisted of—the beauty from within:

Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God (1 Peter 3:3,4 NLT).

What is inside of each of us is where the real beauty resides. The beauty of the Lord should be reflected in those who believe in Jesus Christ.

The good news is that we can reflect His beauty by the power of the Holy Spirit who resides inside each of us.

Summary To Question 20
What Does The Beauty Of The Lord Mean?

One of the descriptions of God's character is that of beauty. The beauty of the Lord means that, in His nature, the Lord possesses everything that is desirable. His character is one of perfection. Indeed, the Scripture emphasizes that the Lord is perfect in His beauty, His character.

Consequently, believers are to desire Him above all. If we delight ourselves in Him, then He promises to give us the desires of our heart. This desire will be the Lord Himself.

Believers are commanded to reflect God's beauty in their conduct. When we do so, we glorify Him.

By the power of the Holy Spirit we can indeed live a life which reflects the beauty of the Lord. This should be our ultimate goal.

Question 21

What Is The Glory Of God?

The Bible speaks of the glory of the God of Scripture. We read the following in the Book of Ezekiel about God's glory:

And in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD; for He hears your complaints against the LORD. But what are we, that you complain against us? . . . Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud (Exodus 16:7,10 NKJV).

What is the glory of God? How shall we understand it?

1. God's Glory Is His Splendor And Majesty

God's glory is His splendor, His majesty. The Bible uses God's glory figuratively as a manifestation of Himself. The glory of God is said to be above the heaven:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens (Psalm 8:1 NIV).

The Bible attributes many appearances and actions of God with His glory.

2. It Is Used Figuratively For God Himself

The glory of God is used figuratively for God Himself. Moses wanted to see the glory, or the Person, of God. We read about this in the Book of Exodus:

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. "But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by" (Exodus 33:18-22 NIV).

The glory of God is another way of saying "God." His glory is equal to Himself.

3. Moses Saw God's Glory

When Moses climbed up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God, the visible glory of the Lord rested upon the mountain.

We read about this in the Book of Exodus where it tells us the following:

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain (Exodus 24:15-17 NIV).

The visible glory was in the form of a cloud. This represented His presence in a unique way with the people.

4. The Glory Departed When The People Disobeyed

When the people disobeyed God, the Bible says that His glory departed from them. We read about this taking place in the Book of Samuel. As the wife of one of the evil sons of the high priest was dying in childbirth, she gave the child an appropriate name:

Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel!” because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband (1 Samuel 4:21 NKJV).

This was one of the most tragic times in the entire history of the nation Israel. God’s glory had departed from the people because of their disobedience.

5. God’s Glory Is Seen In Each Of The Members Of The Trinity

God’s glory is found in each of the three members of the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The evidence is as follows.

God The Father Raised Jesus Through His Glory

We are told that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of God the Father.

Paul said the following to the Romans:

Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life (Romans 6:4 NET)

In this context, the word “glory” represents the power of God the Father.

The Glory Of God The Son Was Seen

Humanity beheld the glory of God the Son, Jesus. John wrote the following about this wonderful truth:

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father (John 1:14 NLT).

When the living God came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ, the people saw the glory of God, the God-like characteristics in Jesus, God the Son. As a human son represents his human father, so God the Son represented God the Father in all ways.

The Apostle Paul said the glory of God is displayed in the face of Jesus Christ. He wrote about this to the Corinthians:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV).

The Apostle Paul was likely referring to his own personal conversion experience on the Damascus road. Indeed, Saul of Tarsus saw God's glory:

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him (Acts 9:3 NIV).

This light was the glory of Christ.

Glory Is Attributed To The Holy Spirit

The third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, also has glory attributed to Him. The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of Glory:"

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Peter 4:14 NIV).

We again find the three members of the Trinity, united together, in their glory.

6. Jesus Glorified The Father In Heaven

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ glorified, or honored, His Father in heaven. Jesus said:

I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge (John 8:50 NIV).

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus prayed to God the Father and acknowledged that His actions brought glory to Him:

I brought glory to you here on earth by doing everything you told me to do (John 17:4 NLT).

The Son always glorified the Father.

7. The Father Glorified The Son

God the Father, in turn, glorified God the Son. The Bible records Jesus saying that the Father glorified Him.

Jesus answered, “If I am merely boasting about myself, it doesn’t count. But it is my Father who says these glorious things about me. You say, ‘He is our God’” (John 8:54 NLT).

The Father said glorious things about the Son.

At the tomb of the dead man Lazarus, God the Father openly glorified His own name. Jesus prayed to the Father to do this. We read:

Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28 NRSV).

The Father was glorified through the Son, as the Son was glorified through the Father. Therefore, the glory of God is seen throughout the members of the Trinity.

8. Believers Are To Reflect The Glory Of God

The glory of the Lord is to be reflected in the lives believers. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about how we are being transformed:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18 NKJV).

We are to reflect His glory in our lives.

Paul told the Philippians to let their lives shine brightly before others:

So that no one can speak a word of blame against you. You are to live clean, innocent as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them (Philippians 2:15 NLT).

Our lights should be constantly shining!

Jesus said that our godly behavior will glorify God the Father. We are to let our light shine so the Father may be glorified:

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16 NIV).

This should cause us to ask ourselves if we are indeed “living as lights” in order to glorify our heavenly Father. This is our calling.

Eventually, believers will be surrounded by God's glory. We read about this in the Book of Revelation. John wrote:

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb (Revelation 21:23 NRSV).

What a wonderful future the Lord has for us! We will be surrounded by the glory and light of God forever and ever.

Consequently, believers should seek to honor and glorify God by our behavior.

Summary To Question 21
What Is The Glory Of God?

God's glory is His splendor, His majesty. Sometimes God's glory is used figuratively of Himself.

The Bible says that Moses saw the glory of God on Mount Sinai. We are also told that when the people disobeyed the Lord, His glory departed from them. The ministry of Jesus Christ glorified God the Father. God the Father, in turn, glorified Jesus.

Believers are commanded to reflect the glory of God. Someday those who have believed will be surrounded by God's glory. What a wonderful day that will be!

Question 22

What Does The Name Of God Mean?

When we used the word “name,” it is the way we address something or someone. However, in Scripture proper names have significance.

Sometimes the same person will have two names. For example, when Rachel died, her son was called, “Ben-oni,” which means, “the son of my sorrow.” The Bible explains it this way:

Rachel was about to die, but with her last breath she named him Ben-oni; the baby’s father, however, called him Benjamin (Genesis 35:18 NLT).

Jacob, his father, named him, “Benjamin,” “son of my right hand.”

We find that the same thing is true with the name of God. His name reveals His character. There are a number of observations that we must make about this important subject.

1. God’s Character Is Revealed Through His Name

God’s name, as revealed in the Bible, is more than a combination of sounds. Indeed, it stands for His character. God reveals Himself by making known, or proclaiming, His name or character. We read in Exodus:

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them (Exodus 6:3 NIV).

His name, the Lord, is how He made Himself known to Moses.

We also read in Exodus about God’s Holy name:

And he [the Lord] said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The LORD’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33:19 NRSV).

Later in Exodus, we read the following:

The LORD came down in a cloud and stood there with him and called out his name “LORD.” Then he passed in front of Moses, calling out, “The LORD, the LORD, a compassionate and merciful God, patient, always faithful and ready to forgive” (Exodus 34:5,6 God’s Word).

The splendor and majesty of the Lord are proclaimed in Scripture—sometimes this is equated with His “name.”

2. We Are To Call Upon His Name, His Person

The Bible commands people call upon “the name of the Lord.” In the Book of Genesis, we find that Abraham built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord:

From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD (Genesis 12:8 NIV).

Here Abraham called upon the “Person of the Lord.”

Scripture commands people to fear, or respect, the name of the Lord. Moses wrote:

If you do not diligently observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, fearing this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 28:58 NRSV).

The name of the Lord should be respected.

Singing praises to His name is the same as singing praises to His Person. We read in Samuel:

For this I will extol you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name (2 Samuel 22:50 NRSV).

We are to sing praises to His character:

To worship God, is to glorify His name, or Person. The psalmist wrote.

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name (Psalm 86:9 NIV).

Therefore, we often find that God’s name means His Person.

3. It Is A Sin To Misuse His Name

It is a sin to misuse the name of the Lord. We read the following words in the Ten Commandments:

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name (Exodus 20:7 NIV).

It is a sin to blaspheme, or profane, the name of the Lord. We are not to dishonor His Person or character by our actions. Moses wrote:

Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD (Leviticus 18:21 NIV).

We must not profane His name.

We also read in Leviticus about the penalty for dishonoring God's name:

Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death (Leviticus 24:16 NIV).

The Lord attaches extreme importance on His name, or Person. Therefore, we should never misuse the name of the Lord.

4. God's Name Is Set Apart

To reverence God, is to sanctify, or set, apart His name. Jesus told we are to recognize the holiness of God in our prayers:

Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy (Matthew 6:9 HCSB).

God's name should always be seen as holy, or set apart.

5. His Name Or Character Defends People

The name of God is that which defends His people. The psalmist wrote about this. He put it this way:

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; May the name of the God of Jacob defend you (Psalm 20:1 NKJV).

It is God's holy character that comes to our defense.

6. Because Of His Name God Will Not Reject His People

God will not forsake His people for His name's sake. We read in Samuel:

For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own (1 Samuel 12:22 NIV).

This is a wonderful promise of God. Because of His character, or name, He will not reject His people.

7. We Are To Make His Name Known

The Bible says that we are to make the name, or character of God, known to the world. In Chronicles we read:

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done (1 Chronicles 16:8 NIV).

Therefore, the Bible speaks of God's name, or character, in a number of different contexts.

Summary To Question 22
What Does The Name Of God Mean?

The name of God speaks of the character of God. God's character is shown in a variety of ways through the use of the word "name." From Scripture, we can make the following observations.

When we call upon His name, we call upon His Person. The Bible says that it is a sin to misuse the name of the Lord because that is dishonoring His Person. We are never to dishonor the Lord.

We are to set apart, or give reverence to His Holy name. Indeed, His character, or name, deserves our respect and devotion.

The name, or character, of God is what defends and protects His own. The Person of God is what looks after us. The Bible also says that God will not reject His people because of His name, or character.

Finally, we are told to make His name known to the world. This is the responsibility of every believer. We are to tell the world the good news about Jesus Christ.

Question 23

Does The Bible Say That God Puts His Word Above His Name? (Psalm 138:2)

There is a statement in Scripture which seems to teach that God actually puts His Word above His Name. In Psalm 138:2, the King James Bible reads as follows:

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name (Psalm 138:2 KJV).

The American Standard Version of 1901 translates the verse in a similar manner. It reads:

I will worship toward thy holy temple, And give thanks unto thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: For thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name (Psalm 138:2 ASV).

The New King James Version reads something similar. It translates the verse as follows:

I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name (Psalm 138:2 NKJV).

This has given the popular idea that God actually magnifies His Word, what He says, above His name or character. Is this what the Scripture teaches? Is God's Word more important than His character? The following points need to be made.

There Is A Question About How To Translate This Verse

To begin with, we must understand that this is a difficult verse. While the King James Version gives the impression that God somehow exalts His Word above His character, this is not what the Scripture teaches.

His Character And Word Have Been Exalted Above All Things

The traditional Hebrew text, the Masoretic text, literally says, "for you have made great over all your name your word." This has been understood in a number of different ways.

A number of versions see the verse saying that God's name and His Word have been exalted above all things.

For example, the New International Version says:

I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word (Psalm 138:2 NIV).

The Holman Christian Standard Version says something similar. It reads:

I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word (Psalm 138:2 HCSB).

The translation “God’s Word” says:

I will bow toward your holy temple. I will give thanks to your name because of your mercy and truth. You have made your name and your promise greater than everything (Psalm 138:2 God’s Word).

The idea here is that God’s character and promise, or His Word, is greater than everything. In explaining this verse in Psalm 138, one commentator put it this way:

The Lord is constant in his love toward his children, and so great is his faithfulness to his “promise-name” (“your name and your word,” v. 2) that the psalmist exclaims that whatever the Lord has done in the past is dwarfed by what he is still doing! For him, the “name” of God evokes the connotation of the promises of the covenant (Willem A. Van Gemeren, *Psalms, Expositors Bible Commentary*, Revised Edition, 2012).

In sum, no matter how we are to understand this verse, we should not interpret in a way which says God puts His Word above His name, or His character, He does not.

Therefore, we should not use the translation, which is found in the King James Version, and a few other versions, to establish how God compares His Word with His character, or name.

Summary To Question 23
Does The Bible Say That God Puts
His Word Above His Name? (Psalm 138:2)

It is a popular idea that the God of the Bible has magnified His Word above His name or character. This is based on the translation of the King James Bible, the New King James Bible, and several other translations. The way the passage reads in these translations indicates that God’s Word is more important to Him than His name.

Modern translations do not render this difficult verse in the same way. They understand it to mean that God’s name or character, as well as His Word, are to be magnified above all things. Instead of contrasting His Word and His name, the psalmist actually links the two together.

To sum up, there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that God magnifies His name above His character. What we are told is that God has exalted His Word equally with His reputation. He accomplishes this by being faithful to His promises.

Question 24

What Does The Hebrew Term Elohim Mean?

When we read about “God” in the Old Testament, we are reading the translation of the Hebrew term *Elohim*. It is important that we have an understanding of the meaning of this word, and how it is used in Scripture.

Elohim Is The Hebrew Name For God

The name commonly used for God in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *Elohim*. It is also found in the singular form *El* and *Elah*. Whenever we find the English word “God” used in the Old Testament, it is a translation of this Hebrew word Elohim, or one of its forms.

While the exact meaning of Elohim is not known, it seems to contain the idea of strength and power. Elohim emphasizes the transcendence of God. This means that He is above all other beings who are called God.

The word is used in the first verse of the Bible:

In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 KJV).

The noun Elohim is plural, but it is always used with a singular verb when it speaks of the true God. This indicates a unity and plurality within the nature of God.

This unity and diversity is revealed in Scripture as the doctrine of the Trinity—one God who exists in three distinct Persons or centers of consciousness, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The Word Elohim Is Used In Other Ways

The word Elohim is not restricted to the one, true God. From Scripture, we find it used in a number of ways:

1. Elohim Is Used Of False Gods

Elohim is used not only for the true God, but also for false gods. We read in Exodus a warning not to make false gods:

Do not make any gods [Elohim] to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold (Exodus 20:23 NIV).

Here Elohim is used in reference to false gods.

2. There Are Instances Of Elohim Referring To Human Beings

On some occasions, Elohim refers to human beings. The psalmist wrote:

I say, “You are gods [Elohim], children of the Most High, all of you” (Psalm 82:6 NRSV).

In this instance, Elohim does not refer to the true and living God but rather to human judges.

3. Elohim Is Used Of Created Heavenly Beings

In the Book of Job, we find that the word Elohim is used of beings in heaven whom the Lord has created:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them (Job 1:6 ESV).

They are called the “sons of God” in this context.

Therefore, when we encounter the Hebrew word Elohim in the Old Testament, we must determine its meaning from the context.

The Singular El Is Used Of All The Members Of The Trinity

The singular form of Elohim is *El*. It has the idea of strength, power, and might. Elohim and El seemed to be used interchangeably.

El is used in the Old Testament of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Genesis, we read about Melchizedek. He is the priest of the Most High God:

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God [El] Most High (Genesis 14:18 NIV).

God “Most High” is probably a reference to God the Father.

The Son is also called El. The prophet Isaiah wrote:

For this reason the sovereign master himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, this young woman is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. You, young woman, will name him Immanuel [El] (Isaiah 7:14 NET).

This verse was cited by Matthew as a reference to Jesus Christ. The angel of the Lord said to Joseph:

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us” (Matthew 1:21-23 NRSV).

The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, is called El in the Old Testament. We read in the Book of Job:

The Spirit of God [El] has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life (Job 33:4 NIV).

Consequently, we have the three distinct Persons of the Holy Trinity all designated with the singular Hebrew El.

The Name Eloah Is Also Used For God

The Hebrew term *Eloah* refers to the one God. We read about this reference in the Book of Deuteronomy. It says:

But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—Then he forsook God [Eloah] who made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation (Deuteronomy 32:15 NIV).

However, this term can also refer to false gods. The Babylonians used this term to refer to their false gods. We read of this in the Book of Daniel:

The thing that the king is asking is too difficult, and no one can reveal it to the king except the gods [Eloah], whose dwelling is not with mortals (Daniel 2:11 NRSV).

Thus, like other words, the context must determine its meaning.

El Is Used In Combination With Other Words

El is used in combination with other words in the Old Testament. These compound words describe God in various ways. They include the following.

El-Elyon

El-Elyon is the God “Most High,” or the “Most High God.” In Genesis, we read of God as El-Elyon. The Bible says:

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High [El-Elyon] and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything (Genesis 14:18-20 NIV).

This seems to be the name of God that was known by the Gentile nations. The term is also used in Deuteronomy.

Moses wrote the following:

When the Most High [El-Elyon] gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:8 NIV).

Here the living God is called the “Most High.”

Daniel wrote of God being “the Most High.” This description of the Lord came from the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar:

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God [El-Elyon] come out! Come here!” (Daniel 3:26 NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar recognized that Daniel’s God was above every other so-called God in the universe.

Isaiah records the King of Babylon describing himself to be like the “Most High.” In the context, it seems like a title of deity. We read:

I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High [El-Elyon] (Isaiah 14:14 NIV).

The God of Scripture is indeed the Lord “Most High.”

El-Shaddai

As *El-Shaddai*, He is God Almighty. The Lord said that He appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by that name. In fact, when the Lord appeared to Moses at the “burning bush”

He informed Moses as to the title with which He appeared to these patriarchs:

And I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty [El-Shaddai], but by my name, Lord, I did not make myself known to them (Exodus 6:3 NIV).

This title expresses His mighty power. To these patriarchs, He was God Almighty.

In the Book of Ruth, we read the Moabitess Naomi referring to God as the “Almighty.”

The Bible says:

But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty [El-Shaddai], has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20 NKJV).

The God of Scripture is the Almighty God.

El-Olam

El-Olam means that God is the everlasting God. Abraham used this term to describe Him.

We read the following account in Genesis:

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God [El-Olam] (Genesis 21:33 NRSV).

Olam expresses the eternal duration of God.

The psalmist wrote about the fact that the God of Scripture has existed from everlasting to everlasting. Indeed, He is the eternal God:

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (Psalm 90:2 NRSV).

God has existed from the very beginning, and He will always exist. This is why He is called El-Olam.

El Gibbor

El Gibbor means, “the mighty God.” Isaiah the prophet described the Lord with a number of titles. Among these was this designation “the Mighty God.” He wrote:

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God [El Gibbor], Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6 NRSV).

The God of Scripture is “the mighty God.”

Jeremiah also used this description of God. He wrote of the great and powerful God whom he served, God Almighty:

You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers’ sins into the laps of their children after them. O great and powerful God, whose name is the LORD Almighty [El Gibbor] (Jeremiah 32:18 NIV).

The Mighty God is our great God.

Elohim-Sabaoth

The term *Elohim-Sabaoth* means the “God of hosts.” “Hosts,” in this context, probably refers to the angelic world.

The psalmist wrote:

Restore us, God Almighty; [Elohim-Sabaoth], make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. . . Return to us, God Almighty! [Elohim-Sabaoth]! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine (Psalm 80:7,14 NIV).

Each of these names gives us insight into the character and workings of God.

Conclusion: Elohim Generally Refers To The God Of The Bible But Can Have Other Meanings

Therefore, we find that Elohim, for the most part, refers to the God of the Bible. However, on occasion it can have other meanings.

As always, the context must tell us how we are to understand the term. We must always keep this in mind.

**Summary To Question 24
What Does The Hebrew Term *Elohim* Mean?**

The name *Elohim* means “strength and might.” This plural noun is the common Hebrew term for God. In the Old Testament, when we see the word “God,” it is a translation of the Hebrew word *Elohim*. However, this is not its only usage.

Indeed, in certain contexts, it refers to false gods. They are called Elohim on a number of occasions. We also find that Elohim is used of heavenly beings which the Lord has created.

In addition, this term is also used of humans. In the Book of Psalms, those who were human judges were called Elohim.

El the singular form of *Elohim* is used for the three members of the Trinity. Indeed, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all called *El*.

Both *El* and *Elohim* are used in combination with other words. These terms give us further understanding of the attributes of God. They mean such things as “God Most High” “God Almighty,” the “Everlasting God,” “the Mighty God” and the “Lord of Hosts.”

In sum, Elohim usually refers to the God of Scripture, the true and living God, but in other contexts it can have other meanings.

Question 25

What Does The Hebrew Term Adonai Stand For?

A name that is used for God in the Old Testament is *Adonai*. What exactly does this term mean? Is it distinct from other names that are used for God?

Adonai Defined: Master Or Lord

Adonai is a plural form of *Adon* which means, “Master” or “Lord.” It conveys the idea of “rulership,” or “dominion.” The Lord said:

Therefore the Lord God of hosts will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire (Isaiah 10:16 ESV).

Isaiah also wrote of the Lord:

See, the Lord [Adonai] the LORD Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low (Isaiah 10:33 NIV).

When used in the Old Testament of God, it is spelled with a capital “L” and then lower-case letters (Lord). When used of humans, all of the letters are lower case (lord).

There are some other observations which need to be made.

The Term Is Applied To Humans

The term is not only applied to God—it is also used of human beings—those who “master” or “lord” over people. The Bible says:

So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master [Adonai], and swore to him concerning this matter (Genesis 24:9 NIV).

Here Abraham is called the “master” of a particular servant.

Sarah, the wife of Abraham, called him by this title, master or lord:

So she laughed silently to herself and said, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master [Adonai]—my husband—is also so old? (Genesis 18:12 NLT).

Thus, this term can, at times, refer to humans. When it does, it speaks of someone who is in authority over someone else.

The Term Is Applied To God

The term *Adon* is also applied to God. We see this in the following ways:

1. Adonai Elohim

Adonai is often joined in Scripture with Elohim. This indicates that God is the one who is Master and Lord, and that we human beings are His subjects.

2. Adonai Yahweh

The term is also used with the divine name—*Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. For example, we read of this in Genesis:

But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus” (Genesis 15:2 NIV).

Therefore, *Adon* can be connected with the personal name for God.

Conclusion: Adon Is Usually Applied To God But Can Be Used Of Humans

The term Adon is most-often used of the God of Scripture, but at times it can be used of humans. As usual, the context must tell us.

Summary To Question 25

What Does The Hebrew Term *Adonai* Stand For?

Another Hebrew word for God in the Old Testament is *Adonai*. It is the plural form of *Adon* which means Lord or Master. It is a term used of both God and humans.

Abraham was called “master or Lord” by one of his servants, as well as by his wife Sarah. However, this is used as recognition of his leadership. It has nothing to do with deity.

On some occasions, it can also refer to false gods. As always, the context must determine the meaning of the term.

When used in English versions in the Old Testament, it is spelled Lord with a capital “L” and lower-case letters. When used of humans, it is spelled Lord with all lower-case letters “lord.”

Adonai is indeed an important term. Hence, it is helpful to understand how and why it is used in the Old Testament.

Question 26

Why Is God Called Yahweh? (Jehovah)

The Hebrew words *Elohim* and *Adonai* are applied to something other than the true and living God. We find each of these terms used for human beings in some contexts in Scripture. However, there is one term for God that is never used of human beings, heavenly beings, or anything else.

1. Yahweh Is The Sacred Name For God

There is one name that is unique to the God of the Bible. This name is *Yahweh*. An alternative transliteration is the well-known word *Jehovah*. Yahweh, or Jehovah, refers to “the self-existent, eternal God” the name God revealed to Moses:

God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14 NIV).

He is the great “I am.”

Moses later wrote:

The LORD [Yahweh] is a warrior! The LORD [Yahweh] is his name (Exodus 15:3 God’s Word).

Moses said that the name of their God is “Yahweh.”

The prophet Isaiah records the Lord Himself saying that this is “His name:”

I am the LORD, [Yahweh] that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols (Isaiah 42:8 NRSV).

He calls Himself by that name.

The Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and emphasized that He was God Yahweh. We read the following words of the Lord:

Therefore I will teach them—this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is the LORD [Yahweh] (Jeremiah 16:21 NIV).

When He teaches them, the people will know that He is the Lord.

Jeremiah also recorded the Lord saying:

The LORD [Yahweh] who made the earth, the LORD [Yahweh] who forms it to establish it, Yahweh is His name, says this (Jeremiah 33:2 HCSB).

Yahweh is the Creator God:

The prophet Amos also stated that the Lord, or Yahweh, was the Creator. He wrote:

The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD [Yahweh] is his name (Amos 5:8 NRSV).

He is the One who made all things.

In the writings of Amos, it also says these things about the Lord, Yahweh:

The upper stories of the LORD's [Yahweh] home are in the heavens, while its foundation is on the earth. He draws up water from the oceans and pours it down as rain on the land. The LORD [Yahweh] is his name! (Amos 9:6 NLT).

The home of Yahweh, the Lord, is in heaven.

Therefore, the name Yahweh or Jehovah (LORD) is the name that God uses of Himself.

His Name Is Sacred

There is something else which we must appreciate. The name Yahweh is sacred. The Jews considered it as unpronounceable, and incommunicable. Yahweh is the covenant-keeping name of God. When the creative aspect of God is recorded, then the name Elohim is used (Genesis 1).

However, when there is a relationship involved with humanity, the name Yahweh is used (Genesis 2). These differences are consistent throughout the entire Old Testament.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that we find Elohim in one context, and then Yahweh in another context.

There is always a reason as to why one term is used instead of the other.

2. The Vowel Points Were Taken From Adon

The name Jehovah or Yahweh is taken from the consonants of the divine name while the vowels come from the Hebrew word for master "Adon." The four letters that spell the divine name (YHWH or JHVH) are called the "Tetragrammaton."

Therefore, Jehovah, or Yahweh, is a combination of two Hebrew words—consonants from one word and the vowels from another.

There Are Small Capital Letters In English Translations

In English translations of the Old Testament, whenever we usually find the word Lord spelled LORD with all capital letters, whether they be small capital letters LORD or large capital letters, it is the translation of the name Yahweh. This is the divine name of the Lord.

3. Yahweh Is Used In Combination With Other Names For God

Yahweh is used in combination with other names for God. They include the following.

Yahweh-Elohim

Yahweh-Elohim is translated “the Lord God.” This title is used of God’s relationship to humanity as the Creator, and Redeemer. In summarizing the creation account in Genesis chapter one, this term is used. We read:

These are the records of the heavens and the earth, concerning their creation at the time that the LORD God [Yahweh-Elohim] made the earth and the heavens (Genesis 2:4 HCSB).

It was Yahweh-Elohim who created the universe.

Later, in the same chapter, we again read of Yahweh-Elohim. It says:

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place (Genesis 2:21 HCSB).

It was Yahweh-Elohim who created the woman, Eve.

When Adam and Eve sinned, it was Yahweh-Elohim who made them garments of skin. The Bible explains it in this manner:

The LORD God [Yahweh-Elohim] made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them (Genesis 3:21 NIV).

Therefore, we find this name of God prominent in the explanation of the original creation, as well as the fall of humanity.

This name is also used of God’s relationship to Israel. Abraham used this designation of God when he sent his servant to find a bride for his son, Isaac:

The LORD God [Yahweh-Elohim] of heaven took me from my father’s home and the land of my family. He spoke to me and swore this oath: ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ God will send his angel ahead of you, and you will get my son a wife from there (Genesis 24:7 God’s Word).

It was Yahweh-Elohim who swore an oath to Abraham.

Moses also wrote:

God also said to Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation” (Exodus 3:15 HCSB).

Thus, we find this compound name for God a number of times in the Old Testament.

Adonai Yahweh

The combination of *Adonai Yahweh* is also found in Scripture. Moses wrote the following:

O LORD GOD, [Adonai Yahweh] you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your might; what god in heaven or on earth can perform deeds and mighty acts like yours! (Deuteronomy 3:24 NRSV).

Here it is translated “LORD God.”

Joshua wrote about Adonai Yahweh, the One who brought Israel across the Jordan:

And Joshua said, “Ah, Sovereign LORD, [Adonai Yahweh] why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!” (Joshua 7:7 NIV).

This is another use of the term of Yahweh with another name for God.

Yahweh Sabaoth – The Lord Of Hosts

He is also known as the Lord of Hosts—*Yahweh Sabaoth*. We read of this title in First Samuel where it says the following:

This man would go up from his town every year to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of Hosts at Shiloh, where Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were the LORD's priests (1 Samuel 1:3 HCSB).

This combination occurs at times with reference to warfare. It occurs mostly when the nation Israel is in some type of crisis. For example, we read:

The LORD of hosts [Yahweh Sabaoth] is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (Psalm 46:7 NKJV).

Here the Lord of hosts is with the people of Israel when they had a pressing need.

The psalmist also speaks of God's power and glory. He wrote:

Who is He, this King of glory? The LORD of Hosts, He is the King of glory (Psalm 24:10 HCSB).

The primary idea behind, "Hosts" is the angels, but the name also refers to the divine power that is available to meet the needs of the Lord's people.

4. The Word Yahweh Implies A Relationship Between The Lord And His People

It is crucial to realize that He is Yahweh to only those who have a relationship with Him. In fact, the name is used throughout the Old Testament with compound words that describe something of His character. We cite the following examples.

He Is The Lord Who Provides

Yahweh is the "providing God." When the LORD stopped Abraham from sacrificing his only son Isaac, this man of God was told that the Lord would provide a sacrifice. The Bible records him saying the following:

And Abraham named that place The Lord Will Provide, so today it is said: "It will be provided on the Lord's mountain" (Genesis 22:14 HCSB).

As "the providing God," the God of the Bible, Yahweh, is the One who meets all of our needs. Only He is able to do this.

He Is The Lord Who Heals

He is the Lord who heals. The Bible cites the Lord Himself as the One who heals the diseases of the people. We read:

He said, "If you will carefully obey the Lord your God, do what is right in His eyes, pay attention to His commands, and keep all His statutes, I will not inflict any illnesses on you that I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am Yahweh who heals you" (Exodus 15:26 HCSB).

The God of the Bible, the Lord, is the healer.

Yahweh Is Our Peace

The Lord is also our "peace." Gideon, the judge, built an altar to the Lord and then used this term to designate Him:

So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites (Judges 6:24 NIV).

He is the One who gives us peace, and who is our peace.

He Is A Shepherd

The Lord is the Shepherd to believers. In the famous twenty-third Psalm, David describes the Lord in this manner:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want (Psalm 23:1 NIV).

As a shepherd, He looks after His sheep.

Yahweh Is The Lord Our Righteousness

He is also the Lord, the One who is “our righteousness.” Jeremiah wrote:

And this is his name: ‘The LORD Is Our Righteousness.’ In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety (Jeremiah 23:6 NLT).

The righteousness of believers can only come from the Lord. Indeed, we have no righteousness whatsoever in our own character.

He Is The Lord Who Is There

When His kingdom comes to this earth, He will be “The Lord who is There.” Ezekiel the prophet wrote about this coming time. He said:

The circumference of the city shall be eighteen thousand cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD is There (Ezekiel 48:35 NRSV).

The Lord will be there with His people, as He presently is there for those of us who need Him. Again, we can take much comfort in this characteristic of the Lord.

Each of these names of the Lord shows how He meets the needs of humanity.

5. The Divine Qualities Of God Are Stressed With His Name

There are also a number of the divine qualities or attributes of the Lord that are stressed. These include the following.

The Lord Is Mighty

The Lord, the God of Scripture, is mighty. Isaiah compared Him to a mighty warrior who triumphs over His enemies. He wrote:

The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies (Isaiah 42:13 NIV).

Mighty has the idea of One who is powerful and victorious. This is a perfect description of the God of the Bible.

The Lord Is Our Maker

Scripture emphasizes that God is the Creator. We are also told that this Creator/God is the Lord our Maker. The psalmist encouraged believers to worship the Lord as our Maker:

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD,
our Maker! (Psalm 95:6 NRSV).

The testimony of the entire Scripture is that the Lord has made us—we are not here as a result of blind chance. We should always acknowledge this.

The Lord Most High

He is called “the Lord Most High.” Again, we read about this in the Psalms:

I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness, and will sing
praise to the name of the LORD Most High (Psalm 7:17 NKJV).

The Lord, as the Most High, is above all things. Nothing can compare to Him. Consequently, He is worthy of our praise.

The Lord Is The Judge

Scripture says that the Lord is “the Judge.” This is one of the aspects of His character that is usually forgotten. However, central to the teachings of Scripture is the idea that God will be the righteous “Judge.” In the Book of Judges, we read of this:

It is not I who have sinned against you, but you are the one who does
me wrong by making war on me. Let the LORD, who is judge, decide
today for the Israelites or for the Ammonites (Judges 11:27 NRSV).

He judges us for our sin. While we do not like to think of Him in this way, this is one of His attributes. He is indeed, “the Lord who is to Judge.”

Conclusion: Yahweh, Or Jehovah, Is The Sacred Name Of God: It Implies A Relationship With His People

Therefore, the divine name Yahweh, or Jehovah, is used in a number of ways in the Bible to testify to the covenant, or revelational, side to His character. As we have observed, every time the personal name of God is used, there is something relational which is stressed.

This is why we find Yahweh used instead of Elohim, the general name for God. Consequently, we should always pay attention when His personal name is used in Scripture.

It is there for a reason, and we can learn many lessons from it.

Summary To Question 26
Why Is God Called *Yahweh*? (*Jehovah*)

In the Old Testament the divine name for the God of the Bible is “the LORD.” The Hebrew word is pronounced *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. The name is made up of four consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. It is known as the Tetragrammaton.

This is the name which the God of the Bible uses for Himself. Indeed, the name *Yahweh* is the covenant name between God and His people. It is not used of false gods.

There are a number of important things which we need to know about this divine name and how it is used in Scripture.

In the English Bible, it is spelled with all capital letters LORD. Whenever we see this, we know that this is God’s personal name, *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. It is not the same as the designation “God.” This is the Hebrew word *Elohim*.

As we search the Old Testament, we discover that there is always a reason as to why some passages use the term *Elohim* to speak of the God of Scripture, while other passages use the divine name *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. Consequently, there are always lessons to be learned when we come across this divine name. Something personal or relational is being taught to us.

This divine name is also used in compound form with other divine names. This includes *Yahweh-Elohim*, *Yahweh-Adonai*, and *Yahweh Sabaoth*. These compound forms of the divine name emphasize the various ways in which the Lord relates to humanity.

As mentioned, this name always implies a relationship which the Lord has with His people. God is not only a majestic God—the Almighty One who is the Most High—He is also a God who is personally involved in the lives of His people. He is a relational God who wants a relationship with His creation—the human race.

This is one of the many wonderful truths we learn from the use of the divine name. Indeed, there is much we can learn when we consider how the name of the Lord is used in Scripture.

Question 27

What Does The Greek Term Theos (God) Mean?

In the New Testament, the common word for God is the Greek word *theos*. It is used a number of different ways and has several different meanings. It is important that we understand the various ways in which this word is used.

The Word Theos Means God

Theos is the basis of the word theology which means, “the study of God.” It is used a number of different ways in the New Testament. They are as follows.

1. It Can Speak Of The True God

When the true God is spoken of in the New Testament, the Greek word *theos* is used. For example, we read in John’s gospel:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God [theos] and the Word was God (John 1:1 KJV).

In this instance, *theos* refers to the true God. This is one of the regular uses of this term.

2. It Can Refer To “A” god

The singular form of the word *theos* may refer to a singular god which is not the God of the Bible. When King Herod appeared before the crowd on a certain occasion, the crowd referred to him as “a god:”

So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god [theos] and not of a man!” (Acts 12:21-22 NKJV).

On this occasion, Herod was equated with deity by the crowd. However, it was not with the God of the Bible:

3. It Can Refer To False Gods

The plural form of *theos* can refer to false Gods—rather than the true God of the Bible. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the non-existence of these so-called gods. He said:

Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods [theos] in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods [theos] and many lords (1 Corinthians 8:5 NRSV).

The Greek word which translated “gods” in this verse is the plural form of *theos*. In this instance, it makes reference to non-existent gods.

4. The Word Also Can Mean Humans

Interestingly, Jesus used the word *theos* to refer to human rulers. We find this usage in John's gospel when Jesus was talking to the religious leaders about His identity. John records the following words of Jesus:

Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods?' [theos] If those to whom the word of God came were called "gods" [theos]—and the Scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, "I am God's Son" (John 10:34-36 NRSV).

This is the use of the plural form of *theos*. Instead of referring to the true God, or to false gods, it has reference to earthly rulers:

Conclusion: The Context Must Determine The Meaning Of Theos

Therefore, it is important to understand the context that *theos* is used to have a proper understanding of its meaning. While the God of the Bible is the primary meaning of this Greek word, it is used with other secondary meanings.

As always, the context must be the final determiner.

Summary To Question 27

What Does The Greek Word *Theos* (God) Mean?

Theos is the common word for God in the Greek New Testament. We find it used in four different ways.

It normally refers to the true God—the God of the Bible. When we find the word "God" in the New Testament in our English Bibles, it is the translation of this Greek word *theos*.

There are also instances where the singular form of *theos* is used of a god which is different from the God of the Bible.

When King Herod gave a speech before a large crowd, while being decked out in royal robes, the people were shouting that he was "a god." This is the same Greek word *theos* which is used of the true God. However, in this instance it refers to a different god than the One revealed in Scripture. This Greek word, on occasion, can refer to false gods. When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he made reference to so-called gods. This is a translation of the word *theos*. In this case, the gods referred to are non-existent.

We also find this word used of human rulers. In Jesus' statement to the religious rulers, He quotes the Psalm where it says the leaders are "gods." This is another example of the plural usage of the Greek word *theos*. Thus, the one can mean one of four things. It can mean the true God, a god other than the God of the Bible, false gods, or it can refer to human leaders. The context must determine how it is to be understood.

Question 28

What Does The Greek Word Kurios (Lord) Mean?

When referring to the true God, the New Testament sometimes uses the Greek word *kurios* translated as “Lord.” It is important that we have a correct understanding of the word—because it is often misunderstood.

1. It Does Not Always Refer To God

The thought behind the word *kurios* is supremacy and authority. *Kurios* is used a number of different ways in the New Testament—it does not always refer to the true God.

2. The Word Can Mean Sir

In fact, sometimes the word is merely a polite title meaning, “Sir.” In these instances, it has nothing to do with God or deity.

For example, when the religious leaders addressed Pontius Pilate, they used the word *kurios*. We read the following:

Sir [*kurios*], we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again’ (Matthew 27:63 NRSV).

In this instance, *kurios* is a form of address. Pontius Pilate was not being addressed as deity!

3. It Also Means Master Or Owner

In some contexts, it has the idea of a title such as, “Master,” or “Owner.” Jesus used it in this manner. He said:

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master [*kurios*] (Matthew 10:24 NRSV).

This is another instance where *kurios* refers to a human—not someone divine.

4. Kurios Can Refer To Husbands

Even husbands are addressed by the word *kurios*. Peter wrote that Sarah the wife of Abraham, called him “master” or “lord:”

For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, when she called him her master [*kurios*] (1 Peter 3:6 NLT).

Obviously, this does not mean Sarah worshipped Abraham. This use of *kurios* has the meaning of leader in this context.

5. The Word Was Used Of Idols

Paul uses the plural of kurios to refer to non-existent idols. He wrote the following to the Corinthians:

Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords [kurios] (1 Corinthians 8:5 NRSV).

This is the plural form of kurios. Here Paul is writing about so-called deities which have no substance—they do not exist. They were called “lords.”

6. It Can Also Mean The LORD (Yahweh Or Jehovah)

There are many times, however, that kurios is equivalent to the divine name *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*. For example, we read in the Book of Acts:

But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord [kurios] (Acts 15:40 ESV).

This is one of the key uses of the term kurios. It is used for the divine name Yahweh or Jehovah—the LORD.

7. Jesus Is Addressed As Both Human And Divine

We find Jesus being addressed by both the human and divine usages of this Greek word kurios. The polite form of kurios meaning, “Sir,” is used.

In John’s gospel Jesus met a woman at a well in Samaria. She addressed Him as kurios (sir). We read:

The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” (John 4:11 ESV)

At this particular time, she was unaware of the identity of Jesus—she did not know that He was the Messiah, the Lord.

There are other times when kurios speaks of Jesus’ full Deity as God the Son. We find an example of this in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. It says the following:

So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10,11 HCSB).

Here Paul states that one-day people will confess Jesus Christ as “Lord.” This does not merely mean “master.” Rather it means that Jesus Christ is Yahweh—the God of the Bible!

When Paul wrote to the Romans, He used *kurios* to refer to the divine name [Yahweh]. Therefore, Jesus is the Lord.

He put it this way to his audience:

If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9 HCSB).

Paul wrote that we are to confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord Himself. Indeed, He is the God of the Bible—the only God who exists. Thus, we find that Jesus is the Lord in the sense that He Himself is the God who is revealed in the Scripture.

8. Divine And Human Usage Of Kurios Are Found In The Same Verse

Interestingly, we find both uses of this word *kurios* in the same verse when Paul wrote to the Colossians:

Slaves, you must always obey your earthly masters [*kurios*]. Try to please them at all times, and not just when you think they are watching. Honor the Lord [*kurios*] and serve your masters with your whole heart (Colossians 3:22 CEV).

In the first instance, it refers to earthly masters, while in the second instance in this verse it is the divine name, Yahweh.

Therefore, when we come across the word *kurios* in the New Testament, it always has to be understood in its context. It is indeed used for the divine name, Yahweh, or Jehovah, but this is not its only use.

Summary To Question 28 What Does The Greek Word *Kurios* (Lord) Mean?

The Greek word *kurios* has a number of different meanings. It is important that we understand the various ways in which it is used.

For one thing, it can be used as a polite title meaning “sir.” It was a form of address to an adult male. There is nothing in these usages which imply any type of deity.

There are instances where the word refers to someone who is a master or owner of slaves. The master of the slave is called *kurios*.

We also find that this Greek word is used with the relationship of a husband to a wife. In this usage, there is certainly no idea of ownership.

On other occasions the word is used to refer to idols, or false gods, which people worship. They are called “lords.” However, there is no idea of genuine deity here. Never do we find in Scripture the slightest hint that these so-called gods have any substance.

However, on a number of occasions it is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. This is the divine name for God. When used in these contexts it refers to the personal name of the God of the Bible.

Jesus Christ is designated as the Lord in many New Testament references. These passages make it clear that He is the God of the Bible, Jehovah, or Yahweh, Himself. This is the consistent truth of Scripture—Jesus Christ is Yahweh or Jehovah.

Consequently, when we come across the term *kurios*, we find that it has a number of usages. The context is always the determining factor as to know its exact meaning.

Part 3

The Personal Attributes Of God

What Humans And God Have In Common

While there are a number of God's attributes that humans do not share, there are others that we have somewhat in common with Him. The Bible says that human beings were made in the image of God. Therefore, to some degree, we humans reflect God.

In this section, we look at such things that we have in common. For example, the Bible says that God is loving, merciful, righteous, and patient. Humans also possess these attributes—though certainly not to the same degree as God. Consequently, we can study the similarities, as well as the differences, of these personal attributes that God and human beings share to some degree.

This section not only help us better understand who God is, it will also help us better understand who we are—the image bearers of God.

In addition, the Bible commands believers to imitate God. Paul wrote the following command to the Ephesians:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children (Ephesians 5:1
NRSV)

This section should help us understand the type of behavior we are to imitate.

Question 29

Is God A Personal God?

While most of the religions of the world believe that God is an impersonal being, the God who is revealed in the Bible is a personal God. This means that He has the characteristics of a person.

A person can be defined as someone who is rational, conscious of their own being. This is how the Bible portrays God. He is a Person—He is not an impersonal force. A number of important points need to be made.

He Is The Living God

The Bible speaks of the God of Scripture as the “living God.” In the Book of Joshua, we read the following about Him:

This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites (Joshua 3:10 NIV).

The God the Bible is the living God—as compared to the gods of the other nations which are not alive. Indeed, they do not exist.

As a youth, David realized that the giant Goliath was defying “the living God.” The Bible records the following episode:

David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26 NIV).

The gods of the Philistines were not living. They were non-existent idols. The God of Israel is the living God. David made this clear when he challenged the giant Goliath.

David later wrote in the Psalms that the Lord, the God of the Bible, was the fountain, or basis of life itself. He expressed it this way:

For with You *is* the fountain of life; In Your light we see light (Psalm 36:9 NKJV).

All life stems from the God of Scripture.

The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed the truth that the Lord is the living God, the true God. He wrote the following:

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath (Jeremiah 10:10 NIV).

Consequently, it is the consistent teaching of Scripture that the Lord, the God of the Bible, is the living God. Of this, there is no doubt.

God Has The Characteristics Of A Person

The Scriptures attribute characteristics to the living God that can only be those of a Person. They include the following descriptions.

1. God Has Personal Names

We find in Scripture personal names used in reference to God. When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, He told him His name. The Bible says:

God said to Moses: I am the eternal God. So tell them that the Lord, whose name is “I Am,” has sent you. This is my name forever, and it is the name that people must use from now on (Exodus 3:14,15 CEV).

The personal name of the Lord is “I am.” This can also be translated as Yahweh, or Jehovah. Only a genuine person has a personal name. Thus, God is not merely a force.

Jesus referred to God as His “Father.” This also implies personality. Mathew record Jesus praying the following:

Then Jesus prayed this prayer: “O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise and clever, and for revealing it to the childlike” (Matthew 11:25 NLT).

The fact that the God of the Bible is called “the Father” emphasizes that He is a Person—not some impersonal force.

2. He Can Give And Receive Love

The Bible speaks of God having the capacity to give love. We read the following from the writings of the prophet Jeremiah:

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3 NIV).

Love is a mark of personality.

Paul wrote about the love that Jesus Christ showed when He died for the sins of the world. He stated it as follows:

But God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful (Romans 5:8 CEV).

Again, we see the indications of personality.

The Lord has spoken of His everlasting love for Israel. Isaiah the prophet records the Lord saying the following:

In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord, your Redeemer (Isaiah 54:8 ESV).

The God of the Bible continually showed His love and compassion for His chosen people.

The psalmist recognized the love that God has had for His children:

But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children (Psalm 103:17 NIV).

We also find that God receives our love:

We love Him because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19 NKJV).

Giving and receiving love is only possible for a person to do. Impersonal objects can neither give nor receive love.

3. He Is A God Who Has Feelings

Scripture attributes feelings, or emotions, to the God of Scripture. For example, He can show kindness. The psalmist wrote:

He loves justice and fairness, and he is kind to everyone everywhere on earth (Psalm 33:5 CEV).

This is certainly a mark of personality.

On the other hand, the Lord can be grieved. In Genesis, we read the following description of the Lord’s feelings before He sent the great flood to the earth:

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain (Genesis 6:6 NIV).

Scripture explains God’s response to sin as “grief.” This type of emotion is a further sign of personality.

The psalmist wrote about how the Lord was grieved with His people. He put it this way:

How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! (Psalm 78:40 NIV)

Again, only a person can be grieved.

4. God Can Experience Sorrow

The Bible also teaches that God can feel sorrow. Jesus, God the Son, cried at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. The Bible says:

Jesus wept (John 11:35 KJV).

The fact that Jesus burst into tears shows both compassion as well as sorrow.

God is indeed a compassionate God. The New Testament writer James emphasizes that aspect of God's character. He wrote:

We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy (James 5:11 NLT).

Here the God of the Bible is described as a tender and merciful God.

The psalmist also recognized the compassion the Lord has for those who are His. He wrote the following:

As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him (Psalm 103:13 God's Word).

Here the Lord is compared to a loving Father which has compassion for His children.

Isaiah the prophet compared God to a young man who cared for his bride. We read the following analogy:

Your children will care for you with joy, O Jerusalem, just as a young man cares for his bride. Then God will rejoice over you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride (Isaiah 62:5 NLT).

God is a God who expresses His feelings. This is a further sign of personality.

5. God Can Show Anger

At times, we find that the God of Scripture can show His anger. The Lord spoke to Moses about His anger toward the nation of Israel which had sinned against Him:

Now leave me alone. I'm so angry with them I am going to destroy them. Then I'll make you into a great nation." But Moses pleaded with the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why are you so angry with your people whom you whom you brought out of Egypt using your great power and mighty hand?" (Exodus 32:10,11 God's Word).

Anger is a characteristic that God shows when necessary. However, it is *not* something He takes pleasure in.

6. He Has A Will To Choose

The Bible says that God has a will—self-determination. He is free to do whatever He chooses. The psalmist wrote:

Our God is in the heavens, doing as he chooses (Psalm 115:3 CEV).

God makes the choices Himself. Nobody counsels Him, or tells Him that which He must do.

Isaiah the prophet records the Lord saying that He has a plan. Indeed, the Lord said the following about His ability to predict events in the future:

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do (Isaiah 46:10,11 NIV).

This is not only a sign of personality—it is a sign of deity. Indeed, only a personal being can plan for the future but only God can know what is going to occur.

The Bible speaks of God as wanting or desiring things. Peter wrote about God's desire that all people should come to repentance:

The Lord isn't slow about keeping his promises, as some people think he is. In fact, God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost (2 Peter 3:9 CEV).

Although God has the ability to make choices, they are not responsive to outside stimulus—as is often the case with human beings. God makes choices based on His own determination. Nothing causes or forces Him to choose a certain path or plan.

7. He Is A God Of Mercy

The Scriptures teach that God has the ability to show mercy.

We read about this in the Book of Jonah:

When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn't carry out the destruction he had threatened (Jonah 3:10 NLT).

Thankfully, God is a God of mercy.

8. God Has An Intellect

The Bible says that God has an intellect. He has a mind that thinks. We find that God uses His mind to instruct His people concerning what they should do. The Bible says”

This is what the Lord, your Defender, the Holy One of Israel, says: I am the Lord your God. I teach you what is best for you. I lead you where you should go (Isaiah 48:17 God’s Word).

Only someone with an actual personality, a personal being, has the ability to teach.

In Proverbs, it says that God sees both good and evil:

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good (Proverbs 15:3 NIV).

To do something like this, takes an intellect.

The Bible also says that God makes “plans.” Jeremiah wrote:

I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord. They are plans for peace and not disaster, plans to give you a future filled with hope (Jeremiah 29:11 God’s Word).

Making plans means intellect.

In the Book of Acts, we read that God has known His works for all of eternity:

Known to God from eternity are all His works (Acts 15:18 NKJV).

God has had knowledge for all eternity. This too shows that He is a personal being.

The writer to the Hebrews stated that God knows “all things.” The fact that nothing can be hidden from Him indicates that He is an actual Person—rather than some impersonal force:

And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account (Hebrews 4:13 NRSV).

The God of the Bible has “all knowledge.”

9. He Is Contrasted With Worthless Idols

The Bible also contrasts the personal living God to idols, which neither hear, nor can they speak. The Apostle Paul told a crowd at Lystra:

Men, what are you doing? We're human beings like you. We're spreading the Good News to you to turn you away from these worthless gods to the living God. The living God made the sky, the land, the sea, and everything in them. (Acts 14:15 God's Word).

The contrast is clear: The God of the Bible is alive—the idols are not.

When he wrote to the church at Thessalonica, Paul again brought out the distinction between the living God and non-living idols. He said:

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9 ESV).

Hence the Bible contrasts the living God who hears, sees, thinks, feels, and acts like a person, with idols which are things, not persons. The conclusion is that God is a personal God.

These are some of the attributes that the Bible says God possesses. They are all consistent with personhood. By demonstrating these in His character, God has shown that He is a personal God.

Summary To Question 29 Is God A Personal God?

The Bible designates God as the living God. He is a rational being—One who is conscious of His own existence. As the living God, He possesses the attributes of a person. From Scripture, we find the following things are said about God's personhood.

Among other things, God can give love as well as receive love. Only a genuine person can do this. Impersonal objects cannot love others.

The Bible also says that God can express anger. Again, this is a sign of genuine personality—for only personal beings have this capacity.

Scripture also says that the God of the Bible has feelings or emotions. He can be grieved, and He can feel compassion. This is further evidence that He is a personal Being.

One of the great things about the Lord is His ability to show mercy to those who deserve judgment. Showing mercy is something only a person can do. The Bible also says that God has a will and an intellect. He thinks, He plans, and He makes choices. All of these are consistent with personality.

Scripture also contrasts the personal living God of the Bible with impersonal idols—that are mere things. The reason for the contrast is to show that God is a Being who truly exists.

All of these characteristics are consistent with personhood. Therefore, it is clear that Scripture portrays the Lord as a personal God.

Question 30

In What Sense Is God A Father?

The term “Father” is employed in both testaments in describing God. Why? Does it mean that we are all children of God, and that God is the Father of all humankind? What does the Bible have to say about God being the “Father?”

2. He Is The First Person Of The Trinity

The one God, by nature, is a Trinity consisting of three distinct Persons—or three distinct centers of consciousness. They are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God the Father is the First Person of the Holy Trinity. He is the One who sent and commissioned Jesus, God the Son, to the earth. Therefore, God is a Father in the sense that He is the First Person of the Trinity.

3. He Is The Unique Father Of Jesus Christ

He is referred to as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is another distinction. Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ (Ephesians 1:3 NLT).

However, He is not the “Father” in the same sense as earthly Fathers. Indeed, God the Son did not have a mother who gave Him birth in eternity past.

In the gospels, we find God the Father acknowledging Jesus as His “Beloved Son.” Matthew records what occurred at Jesus’ baptism:

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17 NRSV).

The Father acknowledges the Son.

The Son, likewise, acknowledges the Father. We also read in Matthew:

My Father has given me everything, and he is the only one who knows the Son. The only one who truly knows the Father is the Son. But the Son wants to tell others about the Father, so that they can know him too (Matthew 11:27 CEV).

Again we must understand that the terms Father and Son are used to describe the unique relationship between the first two Persons of the Trinity. The Bible makes it clear that both the Father and Son have existed together eternally. There was not a point in time when the Son came into being.

Therefore, we should not try to make an exact analogy between a human father, and a human son, when we speak of God the Father, and God the Son. The terms are given to describe the unique oneness, and unity that exists between these two Persons of the Godhead.

4. He Is The Father Of Israel

In the Old Testament, God is said to have been the Father of the nation Israel. We read in the Book of Jeremiah:

Tears of joy will stream down their faces, and I will lead them home with great care. They will walk beside quiet streams and not stumble. For I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my oldest child (Jeremiah 31:9 NLT).

Israel was a special son to God in the sense that the Lord supernaturally began the race through the elderly Abraham and Sarah. Their child Isaac was born after they had passed the child-bearing years. Hence, their own existence is a miracle.

5. He Is The Father Of All Creation

A further way in which the Bible designated God as the Father has to do with the created universe. He is the Father of creation in the sense of the Creator, source, and sustainer of the universe. In the widest meaning of the term, it has the idea as God being the Producer of all things. This includes His role as the Creator of humanity. Therefore, in the creative sense, God is the Father of all humanity. The Apostle Paul said:

For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring. Being God's offspring, then, we shouldn't think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination' (Acts 17:28,29 HCSB).

Paul made God's creative ability clear when he addressed this crowd in Athens. The Lord provides everything to everyone.

James said something similar. He wrote about good gifts that come from God the Father. He put it this way:

Don't be fooled, my dear friends. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father who created all the lights in the heavens. He is always the same . . . (James 1:17 CEV).

In a certain sense, all creation can look to God as their Father.

6. He Is The Father Of All Who Believe

Another designation, that the Bible uses of the Father, is that He is the Father of all those who put their faith in Him. The Scripture makes it clear that God is not the intimate Father of all humankind.

Indeed, He is only the Father to those who believe in Him. While it is true in a general sense that God is the Father, the Creator of every living thing, the intimate relationship a father has to his children is only experienced by those who believe in Him.

The Bible explains the way which one enters into this intimate father-child relationship with God is not through natural birth, but through the “new birth.” This happens when an individual believes and puts their faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

Yet some people accepted him [Jesus] and put their faith in him. So he gave them the right to be the children of God (John 1:12 CEV).

Those who did receive Jesus became God’s children in a unique sense—a spiritual sense.

The Apostle Paul told the Galatians they were God’s children because of their faith in Jesus Christ. He put it this way:

So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26 NLT).

We are God’s children through faith in Christ. Previously to coming to faith, we were not His children.

In the letter to the Ephesians, we read of Paul testifying that believers are part of God’s family, or household:

O now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family (Ephesians 2:19 NLT).

Therefore, God is the Father to believers in a unique sense.

7. The Father Provides Benefits Through Jesus Christ

We also find that God the Father provides a number of benefits for those who believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ.

For example, the Father gives those who trust in Him “all things.” He showed this by not sparing His “own Son.” Paul wrote to the Romans:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32 ESV).

The “all things” include the following.

A. There Is A Special Relationship Between God And His Children

First, there is a special spiritual relationship between God the Father and His spiritual children. Jesus said:

And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven (Matthew 23:9 NRSV).

Believers are part of a huge family with God as their Father. A believer can now have intimate fellowship with God the Father through God the Son.

John wrote about the fellowship which we can have with the Father:

We are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3 NLT).

He is our Father while we are His children.

B. The Believer Is Secure In Jesus Christ

We also find that believers are now in the secure hand of God the Father. Jesus made this very clear when He spoke of the Father's care for His children. We read His words as follows:

My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand (John 10:29 NKJV).

We are His. Nothing can break that relationship. Nobody can snatch us out of the hand of our loving Father.

C. Everything In The Universe Is Ours

Those who are God's children are entitled to all that is His. The good news is that everything in the universe belongs to God. Therefore, the believer will inherit all these things.

Paul wrote the following to the Romans:

And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering (Romans 8:17 NLT).

All things which are His also belong to us because of our faith in Jesus Christ. This is one of the wonderful truths of Scripture.

Therefore, as we examine the Scripture, we find that God is a Father in a number of different senses. The context must be looked at to determine in which sense it is used.

Summary To Question 30: In What Sense Is God A Father?

The God of the Bible is designated as the Father in a number of different ways. It is important that we understand the various senses in which He is a Father.

First, God is called the Father as the First Person of the Holy Trinity. This shows that He is a distinct Person, or center of consciousness, from God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. While only one God exists, the one God is made up of three distinct persons. This First Person is known as the Father.

He is also the eternal Father of Jesus Christ, God the Son. This does not mean that God the Son is His actual offspring. Indeed, it is the way in which this truth, of the nature of the one God, is explained for our benefit. There is a unique relationship.

In the Old Testament God is called the Father of the nation Israel. He is the One who allowed the nation to begin in a supernatural way with the birth of Isaac—the son of the aged Abraham and Sarah. Since their beginning, God has been a Father to them looking after them wherever they have wandered.

God is also the Father of all creation. He is the Father in the sense of the “Begetter” or “Maker” of everything. In other words, all creation ultimately comes from His creative hand. In this way, God is the Father of all people.

However, God is the Father in a different sense to those who believe in Him. Scripture says that God is the loving Father to all those who put their faith in Him. This caring Father has an intimate relationship with those who are His.

Indeed, God the Father has made a number of provisions for believers. He alone is their spiritual Father. Furthermore, He allows them to have direct access to Himself through the Person of Jesus Christ.

In addition, the Father has provided an eternal inheritance for His children. They will be heirs to everything that is His. Meanwhile, He is keeping them secure while here upon the earth.

These are some of the benefits the Father gives to His children.

Therefore, the term Father, when applied to God, finds various meanings in Scripture.

Question 31

Is God Good?

One of the characteristics of God is His goodness. The Bible makes it clear that the God of the Bible is a good God.

Jesus Himself taught the goodness of God. Mark wrote about a conversation Jesus had with a man who called Him “good.” We read the following:

Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18 NRSV).

According to Jesus, only God possesses goodness.

The psalmist also spoke about God’s goodness. He said the earth is full of the Lord’s goodness. He wrote:

He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD (Psalm 33:5 NKJV).

In a wide sense, the goodness of God includes all of His positive moral attributes. The Bible says the following things about the goodness of good.

1. God Is The Source Of All Things Good

Everything that is good has its ultimate source in the God of the Bible. The New Testament writer James made this clear when he wrote the following:

My dear brothers and sisters, don’t be fooled. Every good present and every perfect gift comes from above, from the Father who made the sun, moon, and stars. The Father doesn’t change like the shifting shadows produced by the sun and the moon (James 1:16,17 God’s Word).

It is from God Himself which all good things come.

John the Baptist stated the same truth. He said:

A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven (John 3:27 ESV).

Heaven, in this context, is another way of saying, “God.” Again we find that all good things ultimately have their origin in God.

2. God Is Good And He Does Good

The God of Scripture is not only good—He also does good things. The psalmist emphasized these points when he wrote the following:

You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees (Psalm 119:68 NIV)

The God of the Bible does good things. Consequently, we want to learn from Him how we too can do that which is right.

3. God Is Good To Everyone

God demonstrates His goodness to us in a variety of ways. One way is that He grants mercy to His creation. This is known as “common grace.” This common grace extends to believer, and unbeliever, alike. Jesus said:

In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too (Matthew 5:45 NLT).

Everyone benefits by these acts of goodness from the Lord.

The psalmist wrote about how God shows His goodness to everyone. He explained it in this manner:

The LORD *is* good to all, and His tender mercies *are* over all His works (Psalm 145:9 NKJV).

God is indeed good to everyone. The problem, of course, is that not everyone realizes this. Sadly, many of those who do realize this truth are not thankful for His goodness.

The Apostle Paul stated that God provides for His creation the things that are necessary for our existence:

Yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy (Acts 14:17 NRSV).

The living God is good to everyone. This is clearly taught in God’s Word.

4. He Gives Good Things To Believers

God also grants His special goodness to those particular individuals who believe in Him. For example, those who believe in the Lord are given everlasting life. The Bible says:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16 ESV).

Only those who believe in Christ receive the good “gift” of salvation. Those who do not believe do not have this gift.

His goodness is not only demonstrated by the granting of salvation to all who believe, but also the loving care of watching over His people. We read in the Book of Exodus:

He passed in front of Moses and said, “I am the LORD, I am the LORD, the merciful and gracious God. I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness. I show this unfailing love to many thousands by forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. Even so I do not leave sin unpunished, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations” (Exodus 34:6,7 NLT).

The Lord watches over His people with continuous love and concern.

The Lord Jesus spoke of the concern which God has for those who are His. Matthew records it as follows:

And why worry about clothes? Notice how the flowers grow in the field. They never work or spin yarn for clothes. But I say that not even Solomon in all his majesty was dressed like one of these flowers. That’s the way God clothes the grass in the field. Today it’s alive, and tomorrow it’s thrown into an incinerator. So how much more will he clothe you people who have so little faith? (Matthew 6:28-30 God’s Word).

God looks after those who belong to Him.

The Bible also says that God the Father knows how to give good gifts to His children. Jesus made this clear when He said the following:

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:11 HCSB).

The Lord is the giver of good things to Christians.

In fact, God only desires good things for believers. Paul wrote about this. He said:

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2 HCSB).

God has a will, a plan, for us that is good, pleasing and perfect. This is a wonderful biblical truth!

The psalmist also testified that God does not withhold any good gift for those who trust Him. This promise is recorded as follows:

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless (Psalm 84:11 NIV).

The Lord does indeed give good things to those who believe.

5. God's Goodness Is Shown In His Patience With Humanity

God's goodness is also exhibited in His patience. He waits for people to come to Him by faith by giving them time to repent of their sins. Peter wrote:

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9 NRSV).

God's patience needs to be properly understood. It is not because He is tolerating sin. Rather it is because He wants sinners to repent.

The Apostle Paul echoed the same truth. He said that God's patience with people is for the purpose of leading them to repent:

Do you have contempt for God, who is very kind to you, puts up with you, and deals patiently with you? Don't you realize that it is God's kindness that is trying to lead you to him and change the way you think and act? (Romans 2:4 God's Word).

Patience is shown by the Lord toward sinners. His grace and kindness is shown toward those who are still outside of the faith.

6. God's Grace And Mercy Expresses His Goodness

God's grace is an expression of His goodness. Grace is the opposite of justice. When we deserve judgment, God extends His grace, and mercy. God's goodness and His mercy are spoken of together in Scripture.

The Bible says that the Lord's goodness and mercy are given to those whom He chooses to give it. Moses wrote:

And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19 NIV).

Notice that it is the Lord Himself who makes the ultimate choice as to whom to show mercy and compassion.

The psalmist wrote about the abundant mercy that the Lord gives to those who desperately need it. This includes all of us.

He wrote:

Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me (Psalm 69:16 NRSV).

The mercy of the God of the Bible, as well as His amazing grace, are different ways of expressing His goodness toward sinful humanity.

7. God's Goodness Should Be Celebrated

The goodness of God is something that should be celebrated by believers. The psalmist wrote about this and said the following:

They will give a testimony of Your great goodness and will joyfully sing of Your righteousness (Psalm 145:7 HCSB).

We ought to continually thank the Lord for His goodness. Indeed, like the psalmist we ought to honor Him with praise and song.

Again, we read in the Psalms about the need for thankfulness on the part of God's people toward Him. He wrote:

Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever (Psalm 106:1 NRSV).

With the psalmist, we ought to celebrate the goodness of the Lord.

8. Believers Should Act Like God And Always Do Good

Because God is good, those who believe in Him should also act in a manner which is good toward everyone. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters (Galatians 6:10 NLT).

This is especially true toward those who are believers.

This sums up some of the important things which the Scripture has to say about the goodness of God. Our God truly is good!

Summary To Question 31 Is God Good?

The Bible says that God is good. What do we mean by this? For one thing, God's goodness is the total of His moral attributes. God is good, and He does things that are good. His goodness is demonstrated to us in a number of ways.

For one thing, He provides for all humankind by keeping the universe running in an orderly fashion. This is one way in which He shows His goodness to everyone—believer and unbeliever.

The Bible says that He gives special privileges to those who put their faith in Him. This is how He shows His goodness in a unique way to those who have believed in Jesus Christ. Indeed, those who are "in Christ" have been given blessings by the Lord.

God is patient with the unbeliever by giving them many chances to repent of their sins. In fact, His patience, in not judging them, is an example of

His love toward these people. While they are alive they still have a chance to turn to Him.

God's goodness is expressed in His grace and mercy. However, Scripture is quick to point out that the Lord shows mercy on whom He desires. In other words, it is His choice whom to be merciful to.

Because of these truths, the goodness of God should be celebrated. Indeed, He is worthy of our praise and worship.

Finally, believers are to imitate God in this attribute, and should act in a manner that is good to everyone. In doing so, we glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Question 32

Is God A Wise God?

The Bible says that God is wise. When we speak of the wisdom of God it is a combination of Him having all knowledge, being all-powerful, and knowing how to use these attributes.

The Apostle Paul acknowledged God's wisdom. At the close of his letter to the Romans he wrote the following:

To God, who alone is wise, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen (Romans 16:27 NLT).

According to Paul, God alone is wise.

In Job, we read about the ultimate source of wisdom—God Himself. The Bible says:

But God is the real source of wisdom and strength (Job 12:13 CEV).

The God of Scripture is where wisdom resides.

This being the case, it is important to find out what the Bible has to say about God's wisdom. We can make the following observations about what the Scripture teaches.

1. There Is An Intellectual Element Of God's Character

The wisdom of God may be called the intellectual element in God's character. Wisdom is both an intellectual and moral quality. Wisdom is not merely having a large amount of knowledge—it is putting the knowledge for good use.

The psalmist wrote about the wisdom of God that can be seen in His works:

O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures (Psalm 104:24 NIV).

God's wisdom becomes evident in the things which He does.

2. God Showed His Wisdom In Creation

In the Book of Proverbs, it speaks of God's wisdom in creating the heaven and the earth. The Bible says:

By wisdom the LORD founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens (Proverbs 3:19 NLT).

With wisdom, the universe was created.

Jeremiah the prophet also declared that God's power in creation was directed by His wisdom.

He wrote:

It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens (Jeremiah 10:12 ESV).

This world has been established by the wisdom of God.

3. God His Prophets Special Wisdom

The prophet Daniel was given special knowledge and wisdom by God to interpret the dream of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.

The prophet gave this testimony:

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him" (Daniel 2:20-22 NIV).

God gives wisdom to the wise. In this case, the prophet Daniel was given wisdom to interpret the dream of this pagan king.

4. The Wisdom Of God Cannot Be Comprehended By Humans

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul declared that the wisdom of God cannot be comprehended by any of us. He wrote:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33 NIV).

Indeed, we cannot discover the ways of the Lord. Neither should we attempt to do so.

Paul compared the wisdom of God to the wisdom of this evil world-system. In his first letter to the Corinthians, we read that the wisdom of this world-system does not lead us to the God of the Bible. He said:

What happened to those wise people? What happened to those experts in the Scriptures? What happened to the ones who think they have all the answers? Didn't God show that the wisdom of this world is foolish? God was wise and decided not to let the people of this world use their wisdom to learn about him (1 Corinthians 1:20,21 CEV).

The wisdom of the world is foolishness compared to God's wisdom. Indeed, this is why so few of the "wise" people have not turned to the Lord

in faith. They think that they are too wise for Him—that they do not need Him. This only reveals their utter foolishness.

5. He Displays Wisdom In Dealing With Humanity

In His gracious dealings with humanity, God displays His wisdom to the various intelligences in the heavenly realm. Paul wrote about this to the Ephesians:

So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10 ESV).

Those in the heavenly realm witness God's power and majesty.

Paul wished for believers to have an understanding of that divine wisdom—wisdom that only the Lord can give. He wrote the following to the Colossians:

My goal is that they will be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have full confidence because they have complete understanding of God's secret plan, which is Christ himself. In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2,3 NLT).

In Jesus Christ, we find that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

6. God Applies His Knowledge For The Best Results

God has the ability to apply His knowledge in such a way that will bring about the best possible results. Because God is wise, He always does the right thing, in the right way, and at the right time. God is perfect in His skill in employing His omniscience that accords with His holy nature. In Job, we read:

He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength—who has resisted him, and succeeded? (Job 9:4 NRSV).

The knowledge that belongs to the Lord is always applied righteously. This is so important for us to understand. Nobody who tries to resist Him can succeed. Indeed, success for them is not possible.

7. We Will Not Always Understand His Wise Decisions

While all of God's decisions are wise, this does not mean that we will always understand them. Peter wrote about how some believers will suffer according to God's will:

So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you (1 Peter 4:19 NLT).

God's wisdom and will are not always revealed to us. Therefore, we must put our trust in Him by faith. This includes the times we are suffering.

Moses wrote about the "secret things" which belong to the Lord:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29 NIV).

Therefore, we should not expect to always discover "why" certain things happen. All we need to know is that God is a wise and good God.

8. In The Old Testament Period, Israel Was In A Unique Position To Reveal God's Wisdom

Moses ordered the people of Israel to obey God's commandments. In doing so, the nations of the world would be able to see God's wisdom as being uniquely in them. Moses wrote the following commandments:

Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:6-8 NIV).

Israel, by displaying God's wisdom, would be a testimony of God to the world. During the entire Old Testament period they had this opportunity.

9. Today God Works Through The New Testament Church

This has all changed. Now that Jesus Christ, Israel's promised Messiah, has come into the world God is no longer displaying His wisdom and majesty through one nation.

Indeed, the wisdom of God is manifest in the New Testament church.

Today, believers in Jesus Christ can become that testimony of the wisdom of God—as they display His truths in their lives.

Indeed, because God is a wise God, believers are to imitate Him and act wise. James said that God wants to give us His wisdom:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him (James 1:5 ESV).

We can receive God's wisdom if we ask Him.

Therefore, it is our responsibility to ask. God has promised to answer our requests for the wisdom which He wants to give to believers.

Summary To Question 32
Is God A Wise God?

Scripture testifies that the God of the Bible is wise. Indeed, He is the only wise God. Wisdom, however, is more than mere knowledge—it is the proper use of knowledge. A number of important points need to be made.

We must note that there is an intellectual element in God's character. While He has all-knowledge, He also knows how to apply this knowledge. This is wisdom.

God displays this wisdom when He deals with the human race. His dealings always bring about the best possible results.

In addition, God always does the wisest thing possible. There is no question about this. While God's decisions are always wise, this does not mean that we will always understand them.

While God displayed His wisdom to the world through the nation of Israel in the Old Testament period, today He is doing it through the New Testament church. Indeed, we are told that “in Jesus Christ,” all the wisdom of God is hidden. Those of us who have believed in Jesus are said to be “in Christ.”

This means we can avail ourselves of God's wisdom. Believers are to imitate God's wisdom, and act wisely. In doing so, the world will take notice of our actions, and God will receive the glory.

Question 33

Is God A God Of Truth?

Does the God of the Bible always tell the truth? The answer is an unqualified, “Yes.” God is true in all that He does. He is consistent with Himself and with everyone else. Everything that He has revealed about Himself matches up with reality.

The Bible says the following things about God and truth.

1. There Is Only One True God: There Is No Other

Jesus said that God the Father is the only true God who exists. On the night of His betrayal, He prayed the following to Him:

Eternal life is to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, the one you sent (John 17:3 CEV).

There are no other gods—either true or false. Only the God of Scripture exists, and only He is the true God.

2. Jesus Said He Was The Truth

Jesus Christ, God the Son, made the claim to be “the truth.” The Gospel of John records Jesus saying following:

Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6 HCSB).

He is more than merely truthful—He is the standard of truth. Indeed, Jesus Christ is “the truth.”

3. God Is Always Reliable

We also find that the God of the Bible is someone who is always reliable. Paul reminded the Romans of this when he wrote:

God tells the truth, even if everyone else is a liar. The Scriptures say about God, “Your words will be proven true, and in court you will win your case” (Romans 3:4 CEV).

God is always proven to be right—never wrong.

4. It Is Impossible For Him To Lie

Since God is a God of truth, it is impossible for Him to lie about anything. Paul wrote the following to Titus:

My message is based on the confidence of eternal life. God, who never lies, promised this eternal life before the world began (Titus 1:2 God's Word).

Lying is something which the God of the Bible is *not* able to do. It is indeed a comforting thought to know that He always tells the truth.

The writer to the Hebrews also declared that God cannot lie. He explained it in this manner:

God cannot tell lies! And so his promises and vows are two things that can never be changed. We have run to God for safety. Now his promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us (Hebrews 6:18 CEV).

Whenever He speaks, He speaks the truth.

5. He Does Not Make Errors

Because God is a God of truth, there will be no errors in His written Word, the Bible. This is so important to understand. The Apostle Paul wrote:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NIV).

Since all Scripture is God-breathed, we should not expect to find any errors in its revelation to us. This is because it comes from the God of truth.

6. We Are To Imitate Him In Telling The Truth

Because God is a God of truth, those who believe in Him should follow His example. The psalmist wrote:

Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts (Psalm 15:1,2 NLT).

Believers are to speak the truth of God with sincere hearts.

There is something else which we must appreciate. God hates lying. In the Book of Proverbs, we read the following:

These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination to him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood (Proverbs 6:16,17 NKJV).

Notice that lying is second on the list of things that God hates. God wants people to tell the truth. Lying is something which is horrific to Him. We should have the same attitude.

We also read in another place in Proverbs about how the Lord feels about lying. We read the following:

Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight (Proverbs 12:22 NRSV).

God hates lying—He loves the truth. Lying is an abomination to Him.

There Is Comfort In Knowing That God Always Tells The Truth

There is much comfort for the believer concerning this particular attribute of God. Because God is true, believers can rely on what He has revealed. God will never make any promises that He has to break. His truth will never change in the future. Nothing inconsistent will ever come from Him. Therefore, He can be completely trusted. This indeed is a comforting truth.

Summary To Question 33 Is God A God Of Truth?

The God of the Bible is a God of truth. The idea that God is always truth-telling is taught throughout Scripture. We can make a number of observations concerning what God's Word says on the matter.

First, God is the only God which exists. He is also called "the only true God." This does not mean that there is a lying God somewhere. It means that He is the *only* God—the true God!

Jesus Christ, God the Son claimed to be "the truth." He is not merely truth—He is the standard of truth. Truth begins and ends with Jesus.

This brings us to our next logical point. Because the God of Scripture always tells the truth, His Word is always reliable. We can always trust what He says. In fact, we never have to be concerned whether or not we can trust what He says. We know we always can rely on Him. Indeed, Scripture says it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, when He speaks to humanity, such as in the promises recorded in the Bible, we can always trust what He says.

Since God cannot lie about anything, His written Word, the Bible, cannot have errors in it. Indeed, it would be illogical to assume that anything that came from a truth-telling God would have any mistakes, or contradictions.

Finally, believers are to imitate God in always telling the truth. This is especially important when we search the Scriptures and discover that God hates liars and lying. We should have the same attitude.

In sum, there is much comfort in realizing that His promises can always be relied upon. We can take real comfort in the fact that He will never let us down.

Question 34

Is God Love?

The Bible makes it clear that one of the characteristics of God's nature is that He is love. Indeed, the God of the Bible is a God of love. A number of important observations need to be made about the love of God.

1. The Bible Says God Is Love

To begin with, we note that the Bible states that God is love. We read about this in the first letter of John. It says:

The person who doesn't love doesn't know God, because God is love (1 John 4:8 God's Word).

God is love. Love may be defined as, "seeking the highest good of another." It is the opposite of selfishness. It is not merely some emotion. God is perfect love.

2. Each Member Of The Trinity Is Love

Scripture also teaches that each member of the Holy Trinity can give and receive love:

Indeed, God the Father showed His love to the world in sending His Son, Jesus Christ. In the most famous verse in the Bible we read the following:

God loved the world this way: He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life (John 3:16 God's Word).

God the Father is able to express love.

The Son, Jesus Christ, is also able to give and receive love. The Apostle Paul spoke about how God the Son loved him when he wrote to the Galatians. We read:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20 ESV).

Paul was loved by God the Son, Jesus.

The Apostle Paul wrote of the love of the Holy Spirit. At the close of his letter to the Romans he said the following:

Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Do this because of your love for me, given to you by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:30 NLT)

The love which the Romans exhibited toward Paul was given by the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Each member of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is both personal and loving. The love among the members of the Trinity is not merely expressed between themselves. It is shown to their highest creation—the human race

3. God Is Not The Same As Love

While one of God's most obvious attributes is love, it must be understood that He is not equivalent to love. Love is an attribute of God. The statement, "God is love" is not reversible. We can rightly say that God is love but we cannot say that "love is God"—for that would make God impersonal. This is not what the Bible teaches about either God or love. Love is not God!

4. His Love Is Perfect And Continual

The God of the Bible can give of Himself perfectly, and continually. He will never exhaust His supply of love.

The Bible quotes God saying the following to Israel:

Long ago the LORD said to Israel: "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself" (Jeremiah 31:3 NLT).

What a wonderful statement this is! His love is everlasting to His chosen people. Indeed, when we read through the New Testament, we find God showing His love toward Israel time after time.

5. He Showed Us His Love By Giving Us The Gift Of His Son

It is impossible to love without giving. God has clearly demonstrated His love for humankind by giving the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. John wrote about this as follows:

But anyone who does not love does not know God—for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us (1 John 4:8-12 NLT).

The sending of God the Son into the world was the highest expression of love which God could make toward us. Indeed, He did not send an angel to save us—He sent God the Son!

The Son not only came into our world, He died for the sins of the world. The Apostle Paul wrote about this ultimate demonstration of God's love for humanity—the death of Jesus Christ for lost sinners. He put it this way:

Christ died for us while we were still sinners. This demonstrates God's love for us (Romans 5:8 God's Word).

God has showed His love for us in tangible way.

Indeed, Jesus said that the greatest thing a person could do is to lay down their life for someone. John records Him saying:

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13 NKJV).

The ultimate demonstration of love was shown by Jesus Christ. He came to our world and then He suffered a humiliating death on the cross.

6. His Love Is Shown By His Grace

God's love for sinful people is also shown by His grace, or unmerited favor, that He displays for them. Paul wrote the following to the Ephesians:

But God was merciful! We were dead because of our sins, but God loved us so much that he made us alive with Christ, and God's wonderful kindness is what saves you. God raised us from death to life with Christ Jesus, and he has given us a place beside Christ in heaven. God did this so that in the future world he could show how truly good and kind he is to us because of what Christ Jesus has done (Ephesians 2:4-7 CEV).

God's grace is another demonstration of His love for humanity. Indeed, the fact that He offers eternal salvation to undeserving humanity shows His great love for us.

7. While God Is Love There Is Punishment For Sin

This brings us to our next point—something which people do not like to think about. Although God is love, the Bible says that He will judge those who reject Him and His Son Jesus Christ. Some people wrongfully assume that God will not punish unbelievers because He is a God of love.

However, God is also holy. His love cannot overrule His holiness and justice. There will be a final judgment of the wicked for those who have rejected Jesus Christ. This is consistent with the God of the Bible who is a God of love but also a God of justice and holiness. Jesus has told us what God will say on Judgment Day to those unbelievers who have turned away from His truth:

Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons!' (Matthew 25:41 NLT).

Such is the awful fate which awaits the lost.

The Apostle Paul also wrote of this judgment. At His Second Coming, we are told that Jesus Christ will bring the wrath of God upon those who do not believe. The Bible says:

All of this shows that God judges fairly and that he is making you fit to share in his kingdom for which you are suffering. It is only right for God to punish everyone who is causing you trouble, but he will give you relief from your troubles. He will do the same for us, when the Lord Jesus comes from heaven with his powerful angels and with a flaming fire (2 Thessalonians 1:5-8 CEV).

Love does not mean the withholding of judgment. Indeed, we are told that God will punish those who are not His. Again, we emphasize that Scripture speaks of a terrible fate which lies ahead for those who are unbelievers.

8. Believers Are To Imitate Jesus In Loving Others

Believers will face no such punishment for Jesus Christ has taken it upon Himself. Indeed, God has shown His love for the world when He sent Christ to die for our sins. In like manner, we are to imitate Christ by selflessly giving ourselves to the needs of others.

Jesus said:

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other (John 13:34 NLT).

We are to love fellow believers in the same manner that Christ loved us. This will be what identifies Christians.

The Apostle Paul echoed this thought. He emphasized that we are to consider the needs of others above our own needs. Paul wrote about this to the Philippians:

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4 NRSV).

Our goal should be to meet the needs of others.

In addition, to show our love for God, we are to keep His commandments. John wrote that the commandments of the Lord are not a burden:

For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3 NRSV).

Therefore, those who believe in Jesus Christ have the opportunity, as well as the obligation, to demonstrate God's love to all.

In sum, there are number of things which we learn from Scripture about the doctrine of the love of God.

Consequently, it will be beneficial if we take the time to consider that the Bible has to say on this most important of subjects.

Summary To Question 34 Is God Love?

The Bible says that love is one of God's attributes or characteristics. Indeed, the God of the Bible is a God of love. He seeks the highest good for others. However, the reverse of this is not true. Love is not God. Love is an attribute or characteristic of God, but His character is made up of more than the one attribute of love. This must be understood at the outset.

The love of God is a very important topic. It is one that must be correctly understood. Therefore, we must diligently search the Scripture to find out exactly what God says about this most important of subjects.

For one thing, we find that each member of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, are said to be "love." Each of them is able to give and receive love.

In addition, we are specifically told that each member of the Trinity loves the human race. Since the God of the Bible is made up of these three distinct persons, and each of them is said to show love to others, we can truly say that God is love.

The Bible also teaches that God exercises His love perfectly, and continually. In other words, He never stops loving and His love is always perfectly expressed. When He loves, it is always to seek the highest good of the object of His love.

We must appreciate that love cannot be demonstrated without giving and God is One who is continuously giving. Indeed, God showed His love to the world in that He gave His "only Son," Jesus Christ.

For one thing, Jesus came to this world to show us what God is like. In addition, He suffered and died in our place so that we will not have to eternally suffer. This is what love is all about. Although God is a God of love His love cannot overrule His holiness. Indeed, He must judge sin. The love of God does not cancel out His justice.

Thus, while He loves the sinner, sin must be judged. If a person is not willingly to accept the payment which Jesus Christ has made for their sin on the cross, then they must pay the price themselves. This judgment of sin is consistent with the love of God.

Since God showed His love by sending of Jesus Christ to the earth to die for the sins of the world, believers are to imitate that love that God has shown. We show that we love God by keeping His commandments. This is how we reflect His love.

This sums up some of the basic truths about God and His love. It is a topic that we should all explore.

Question 35

What Special Aspects Are There To God's Love? (Whom Does God Have A Special Love For?)

While God has a general love for the people of the world the Bible also teaches that there are special aspects to His love. Indeed, as we search the Scriptures, we find that there is a special love between God and the nation of Israel, between the Lord and the New Testament church, and there is a special love between the three members of the Holy Trinity. We can make the following observations about this special love of God.

1. God Has A Special Love For The Nation Israel

God has had a unique love for the nation of Israel. Moses wrote about this special love of God in delivering the children of Israel from Egypt:

But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:8 NIV).

Israel was God's chosen people. Consequently, He had a special love for them.

In Zephaniah, we read about God's love for His people. We are told that when believers obey Him, God actually sings!

For the LORD your God has arrived to live among you. He is a mighty savior. He will rejoice over you with great gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will exult over you by singing a happy song (Zephaniah 3:17 NLT).

Like Israel of old, all of us should desire that the Lord will be singing about us!

Isaiah the prophet praised the Lord for His special love for the nation of Israel—His chosen people. He wrote:

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones (Isaiah 49:13 NRSV).

Israel was given a special place in God's program. God's love is expressed in the covenant that He made with this nation.

2. God Has A Special Love To New Testament Believers

During the Old Testament period, the Lord was uniquely working through one nation, Israel. This is no longer the case. Now that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has come into the world, God's work is now being done through the New Testament church. As was true with Israel during the previous

age, God now shows His special love for those who have believed in His Son. Indeed, the church is today the special object of God's love.

Indeed, we find that Jesus spoke of this love when He addressed His disciples.

The Gospel of John records Him saying:

For the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God (John 16:27 NLT).

God the Father has a special love for those who are members of the New Testament church—the true believers in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul likewise declared the great love that God has for those who are His.

To the Ephesians, he wrote:

But God is rich in mercy because of his great love for us (Ephesians 2:4 God's Word).

This special love is shown by His continual mercy to those of us who have trusted Him. The God of the Bible, who is rich in mercy, shows this mercy to those who are His.

God Shows His Love Through Discipline

The love of God is also shown through discipline. When a believer falls into sin, then the God of the Bible shows His love by disciplining them. The writer to the Hebrews noted this when he wrote the following:

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives (Hebrews 12:6 ESV).

Only God's children are disciplined in this manner. God does not discipline those who are not His. Judgment awaits them.

3. There Has Been A Special Love Between God The Father And God The Son

The Bible also speaks of a special love between the first two the members of the Trinity—God the Father and God the Son. God wants the same type of love among His people as is demonstrated between the Father and the Son. Jesus said:

And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:26 NKJV).

What a wonderful truth! The love that exists between God the Father and God the Son can be experienced to some degree in the life of the believer.

This sums up the special love which the Bible says that God has for Israel, the New Testament church, as well as the unique love that is expressed between the members of the Holy Trinity—particularly between God the Father and God the Son.

Summary To Question 35

**What Special Aspects Are There To God's Love?
(Whom Does God Have A Special Love For?)**

While the God of the Bible loves the entire world, we also find that there is a special love which He has exhibited. Indeed, there are three objects of this special love.

First, He has a special love toward the nation Israel. We also find a special love toward the believers which make up the New Testament church. Finally, the Bible speaks of a special love between God the Father and God the Son. We can make the following observations.

The Bible says that God showed a special love for the nation of Israel. It was through this nation which God showed Himself in a unique way to the world. Scripture says that God has loved this people with an everlasting love. On the pages of the Old Testament, we continually see God's love for this nation. Even when they had turned their back on Him, He still loved them.

Once Christ Jesus, the promised Messiah, was rejected by the nation, God began a new work. From that time until today, God's work is being accomplished by the New Testament church—the genuine believers in Jesus. Scripture also says there is a special love that God now has for those of us who believe in Christ.

Among other things, God demonstrates His love for believer by disciplining us when we sin. While this does not seem pleasant at the time, it is for our own good. The Lord is always seeking the highest good for those who love Him. Indeed, His love for us is special.

There has been, and continues to be, a special love between God the Father and God the Son. The Bible says that they love each other and have loved each other for all eternity.

In sum, before the world was created there was love and communication among the members of the Trinity. Consequently, we can truly say that God is love.

Question 36

Is God Faithful?

One of the most comforting and assuring attributes of God is His faithfulness. When we say God is faithful, it means He is totally trustworthy. Indeed, He is perfectly reliable. The prophet Isaiah wrote of this. He put it this way:

O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure (Isaiah 25:1 NRSV).

God's plans are faithful and true.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote about the greatness of God's faithfulness:

The unfailing love of the LORD never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day (Lamentations 3:22,23 NLT).

His faithfulness is indeed great.

Moses said that God abounds in His goodness and truth. He wrote:

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6 NKJV).

The Contemporary English Versions says:

Then he passed in front of Moses and called out, "I am the LORD God. I am merciful and very patient with my people. I show great love, and I can be trusted" (Exodus 34:6 CEV).

The God of the Bible can indeed be trusted.

Moses also wrote to the children of Israel about the faithfulness of God. He put it this way:

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9 NRSV).

Here, He is called "the faithful God." In another place, Moses chided the people for not trusting in God's faithfulness:

Is this the way you repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Isn't he your Father who created you? Has he not made you and established you? (Deuteronomy 32:6 NLT).

The Lord created these people and He established them. Certainly, He will be faithful to them. This is the message Moses was delivering to the people.

Paul wrote about the faithfulness of God in protecting believers from the evil one. He wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3 NKJV).

Clearly, Scripture emphasizes the faithfulness of God.

He Is Faithful In Many Ways

From a search of the Scripture, we find that God's faithfulness is stated in a number of ways. They include the following.

1. He Is Totally Trustworthy In His Promises

For one thing, God's words will always come to pass. Therefore, believers may rely upon His promises. We read the following in the Book of Hebrews:

We must hold tightly to the hope that we say is ours. After all, we can trust the one who made the agreement with us (Hebrews 10:23 CEV).

The One who has made promises to us will be faithful to keep these promises.

The writer to the Hebrews gave the example of God's faithfulness to Sarah, the wife of Abraham. He wrote:

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised (Hebrews 11:11 NKJV).

God had promised a son to the aged Abraham and Sarah. As always, God comes through with His promises. They did conceive a son.

We read in the Book of Second Samuel about God's words being faithful and true. This is stated as follows:

And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant (2 Samuel 7:28 NKJV).

When God promises something, it will always come to pass. This is something which we can always rely upon.

2. God Does Not Lie About Anything

Balaam was a Gentile prophet. He emphasized that God is not like human beings who lie. He made the following statement:

God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (Numbers 23:19 NRSV).

This is a remarkable statement! God should never be compared to humans who lie or change their mind. The God of the Bible does not do these things. When He speaks, He comes through with what He promises. These are truths we always must remember.

Paul wrote to Titus about the impossibility of God lying about anything. At the beginning of his letter, he wrote the following:

In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began (Titus 1:2 NKJV).

The God of Scripture cannot lie. Indeed, it is indeed impossible for Him to do so.

To the church at Rome, Paul contrasted the truth-telling God of Scripture with human beings—who are less than truthful. He wrote:

What then? If some did not believe, will their unbelief cancel God's faithfulness? Absolutely not! God must be true, but everyone is a liar, as it is written: That You may be justified in Your words and triumph when You judge (Romans 3:3,4 HCSB).

The comparison is obvious. It is not possible for God to lie while we humans often have a difficult time with the truth.

3. He Is A Faithful Creator

The God of the Bible is not only the Creator—He is a faithful Creator. Peter emphasized this as he wrote to those who were suffering. He put it this way:

So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you (1 Peter 4:19 NLT).

The Creator of all things has showed Himself to be faithful. Indeed, He will never fail those who are His. Never!

4. God Is Faithful To Forgive

The God of Scripture is faithful to forgive believers when we confess our sins.

John wrote the necessity of confession of sin, as well as what the Lord does in response:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9 HCSB).

God's faithfulness can be seen in His forgiveness. He forgives when we confess. Therefore, it is necessary that we admit to Him our sins.

5. Jesus Is A Faithful High Priest

Jesus Christ is a merciful and faithful High Priest who answers the prayers of His people. The writer to the Hebrews stated:

Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17 NRSV).

The faithfulness of God is seen in Jesus acting as our High Priest. In other words, He acts as a go-between between us and God the Father.

6. God Will Not Abandon His People

The Bible also stresses the fact that God will not abandon His people. We find that He has kept all of His promises in which He made to the nation Israel. We read in the Book of Deuteronomy about this aspect of God's faithfulness:

For the LORD your God is merciful—he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors (Deuteronomy 4:31 NLT).

When the Lord makes an agreement with individuals or nations, He always keeps His part of the bargain. If there is any failure, it is always on the human side.

The leader Joshua wrote about the faithfulness of God in delivering Israel from their enemies. He said:

So the LORD gave Israel all the land He had sworn to give their fathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side according to all He had sworn to their fathers. None of their enemies were able to stand against them, for the LORD handed over all their enemies to them. None of the good promises the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed. Everything was fulfilled (Joshua 21:43-45 God's Word).

The Lord gave His people victory over their enemies. The nation of Israel had to be reminded of this. They were not to forget that none of their enemies could stand against them because the Lord was with them. He was indeed faithful to His promises!

The prophet Daniel acknowledged in prayer that God has showed faithfulness to His people. He stated it this way:

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your promises of unailing

love to those who love you and keep your commands” (Daniel 9:4 NLT).

The fulfillments of God’s promises are recorded in Scripture.

For example, as he was about to die, we again read of Joshua reminding the nation of Israel of God’s faithfulness to them:

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 (Joshua 23:14 NIV).

The God of Israel had promised not to abandon those who are His. Joshua reminded the people that the Lord was faithful to these promises. Indeed, He had never failed them in the past.

7. He Will Remain Faithful Though Believers May Deny Him

Even if we are unfaithful to Him, He remains faithful to us. Paul emphasized this truth when he wrote to Timothy He said:

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13 NKJV).

For the believer, there is much comfort in the knowledge that God has been faithful to His promises. Since God’s word is always truth, the Christian can place complete trust in His promises. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this (1 Thessalonians 5:24 NLT).

Through everything, God is always faithful.

8. God Desires Faithfulness From His People

The faithful God desires faithfulness for those who have trusted Him. Paul wrote the following to the church at Corinth:

Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2 NLT).

This is the key for believers—faithfulness to what God has entrusted to us.

Paul told Timothy that faithful people should teach others the truth of the Word of God. He put it this way:

You’ve heard my message, and it’s been confirmed by many witnesses. Entrust this message to faithful individuals who will be competent to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2 God’s Word).

To be faithful to God's promises, we need to pass His Word on to others.

In the Book of Galatians, Paul declared that believers share Abraham's blessing because of faith in Jesus Christ:

And so it is: All who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith (Galatians 3:9 NLT).

From the totality of the teaching of Scripture, it is clear that God has always been faithful, and that He will always be faithful. As the psalmist put it so well, God is faithful in everything that He says or does:

For your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. You rule generation after generation. The LORD is faithful in all he says; he is gracious in all he does (Psalm 145:13 NLT).

As He is faithful, God wants us to be faithful. This is one of the attributes of God which believers should constantly mimic. Indeed, He is looking for faithful people.

Summary To Question 36 Is God Faithful?

The God of the Bible is faithful. Indeed, we find the Bible emphasizing the faithfulness of the Lord. Scripture lists a number of different ways in which God has shown His faithfulness. They include the following.

First, He is totally trustworthy in everything that He says. He is faithful to His Word—He does not lie. Indeed, the Bible says that He cannot lie. This means whenever we come across a promise of God in Scripture, which is written specifically to us, we can claim that promise for our life.

The Lord is the faithful Creator. As the Creator, He has made us for a purpose, and He is faithful in bringing out that purpose in the lives of those who are His.

When we sin against the Lord, we are to come to Him for forgiveness. We also find that God is faithful to forgive those who sin against Him. Jesus Christ is called the faithful High Priest. God's faithfulness is also demonstrated in the fact that He will not abandon His people. Indeed, one of the great promises of Scripture is that the God of the Bible will never abandon or forsake those who are His. He will never leave us!

Finally, He will remain faithful to those who deny Him. Indeed, He is faithful even when we are not.

Because He is faithful, God desires faithfulness from His people.

Question 37

Is God Righteous?

The psalmist declared the Lord, the God of the Bible, is righteous—He always does that which is right:

Gracious *is* the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God *is* merciful (Psalm 116:5 NKJV).

God is a righteous God.

Ezra the scribe wrote of God's fairness to the nation Israel. Indeed, he noted that the Lord had been more than fair by letting some of the people survive:

LORD God of Israel, you have been more than fair by letting a few of us survive. But once again, our sins have made us ashamed to face you (Ezra 9:15 CEV).

Even though the Lord was more than fair to them, they still sinned against Him. Unhappily, this type of behavior occurs much too often.

In another psalm, we find that God's commands are entirely righteous. Indeed, the psalmist praised the Lord for His righteousness:

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous (Psalm 19:9 NIV).

There is nothing in Scripture that is declared more strongly than the righteousness of the God of Scripture. Indeed, righteousness belongs to the Lord.

The prophet Daniel acknowledged God's righteousness in the strongest of terms.

In his prayer, we find him saying the following:

Everything you do is right, our Lord. But still we suffer public disgrace because we have been unfaithful and have sinned against you. This includes all of us, both far and near—the people of Judah, Jerusalem, and Israel, as well as those you dragged away to foreign lands, . . . And when you finally punished us with this horrible disaster, that was also the right thing to do, because we deserved it so much (Daniel 9:7,14 CEV).

It is clear that the Scripture teaches that God is righteous. What exactly does the Bible mean when it says that the God of Scripture is righteous?

A number of observations need to be made.

1. **God Always Does What Is Right**

God's righteousness means that God's character, or nature, always leads Him to do that which is right or just. Righteousness is holiness in action. We can also refer to God's righteousness as God's justice.

God Brings Justice Every Morning

The prophet Zephaniah wrote that God brings His justice every day. He brings the truth to the light. We read:

The righteous Lord is in that city. He does no wrong. He brings his judgment to light every morning. He does not fail. But those who are perverted are shameless (Zephaniah 3:5 God's Word).

The Lord is the final standard of righteousness and justice. Indeed, according to this passage in Zephaniah, God can do nothing unjust.

2. **He Does Nothing In Darkness**

Isaiah the prophet wrote about how the Lord openly speaks His truth—He does nothing in darkness or in secret:

The LORD did not speak in a dark secret place or command Jacob's descendants to search for him in vain. The LORD speaks the truth, and this is what he says (Isaiah 45:19 CEV).

This is an all-important truth. We don't have to stumble around in darkness trying to find God's truth. He openly reveals it to us.

3. **The Lord Testifies To His Own Righteousness**

Isaiah the prophet records God testifying to His own justice. In doing so, He makes a number of powerful statements:

Why don't you get together and meet me in court? Didn't I tell you long ago what would happen? I am the only God! There are no others. I bring about justice, and have the power to save (Isaiah 45:21 CEV).

The Lord reminds the people that He had already told them long ago what would come to pass. True to His Word, it did indeed come to pass. Consequently, they should have no complaint against Him because the righteous God warned them about it ahead of time.

4. **We Cannot Tell Him What Is Right**

Because God is always righteous, humans cannot instruct Him about right and wrong. Indeed, Paul compared it to the clay objecting to the potter who was shaping it. We read in Romans:

But, my friend, I ask, "Who do you think you are to question God? Does the clay have the right to ask the potter why he shaped it the way

he did? Doesn't a potter have the right to make a fancy bowl and a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?" (Romans 9:20,21 CEV).

He, of course, is the potter while we are the clay. He molds and shapes us and tells us what to do—we do not tell Him! Indeed, no can tell the Lord what is right and what is wrong. He alone is the standard of righteousness. Consequently, we must submit to all of His commands.

5. God Does Not Have To Explain His Actions To Anyone

There is something else we must appreciate. God is answerable to nobody. Indeed, the living God does not have to explain His actions to any human, angel, or any other heavenly being which He has created.

In the Book of Job, we read of the Lord saying:

I am the LORD All-Powerful, but you have argued that I am wrong . . . Now you must answer me. Are you trying to prove that you are innocent by accusing me of injustice (Job 40:2,8 CEV).

When God responded to Job, He did not give specific reasons as to why He did certain things. To the contrary, His answers to Job emphasize His own authority and majesty.

Consider the following question that God had earlier asked Job:

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much (Job 38:4 NLT).

If Job did not know how God created the physical universe, then how could he tell Him how to run the moral universe? He could not. Neither can we. None of us are in a position to question the righteousness or the actions of God. We should never forget this!

We do find that Job realized that he was in no position to question God:

Job said to the LORD: Who am I to answer you? (Job 40:3.4 CEV).

Who indeed are any of us who try to question the Lord's righteousness and wisdom?

The Lord then asked Job about his power:

Are you trying to prove that you are innocent by accusing me of injustice? Do you have a powerful arm and a thundering voice that compare with mine? If so, then surround yourself with glory and majesty. Show your furious anger! Throw down and crush all who are proud and evil. Wrap them in grave clothes and bury them together in the dusty soil. Do this, and I will agree that you have won this argument (Job 40:8-14 CEV).

Job neither knew how the Lord originally created the physical universe, neither did he have the power to do create or sustain anything on his own. This power belongs to the Lord and to Him alone.

Therefore, the Lord owed Job no answer as to why He acted in the way that He did. Neither does He owe an answer to any of the rest of us. This is a solemn truth that each and every one of us would do well to remember.

Isaiah the prophet records the Lord comparing His ways to our ways. From His statement we find that there is no comparison:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For 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 ESV).

Therefore, finite human beings are in no position to question the God of the Bible about His actions, His justice, His judgments, or anything that He does. Our responsibility is to obey Him—not question Him.

6. God Always Deals Righteously With Humanity

God deals righteously toward humanity. Abraham knew that God was just or righteous. He said to the Lord:

Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just? (Genesis 18:25 ESV).

Abraham realized that God was the righteous Judge of the entire earth. Therefore, God would be fair in His dealings with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

7. The Lord Is Perfect In His Ways

Moses declared that the Lord is perfect in all His ways. Furthermore, he said that these ways are always fair. He stated it in this manner:

He is a rock. What he does is perfect. All his ways are fair. He is a faithful God, who does no wrong. He is honorable and reliable (Deuteronomy 32:4 God's Word).

The behavior of the Lord is always honorable and reliable. He deals with humans in ways which are always fair. These are certainly comforting truths. Though we may not be dealt with in a fair manner by our fellow humans, God will always deal fairly with us.

These words of Moses are echoed in the New Testament. Paul says Moses' teachings reveal God's righteousness toward humanity. To the Romans, he wrote:

So Moses' Teachings are holy, and the commandment is holy, right, and good (Romans 7:12 God's Word).

Hence, the New Testament also emphasizes the comforting truth that God deals with people in a righteous way.

8. Righteousness Sometimes Involves Judgment

God reveals His righteousness by loving the things that are good, and by hating the things that are evil. Consequently, His righteousness sometimes results in judgment.

In the Book of Revelation, we read of this. An angel testified to God's righteousness as a terrible judgment was coming upon the earth. The Bible says:

And I heard the angel who had authority over all water saying, "You are just in sending this judgment, O Holy One, who is and who always was" (Revelation 16:5 NLT).

God remains righteous when He punishes.

In First Kings, we have the prayer of Solomon recorded as he dedicated the First Temple. Listed among other things, he gave the following testimony to God's righteousness:

Then hear in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness (1 Kings 8:32 ESV).

Solomon realized that God's righteousness sometimes required judgment. The Lord condemns the guilty and vindicates the righteous.

9. God's Righteousness Includes Judgment And Reward

God's righteousness is seen in both judgment and reward. Again, Paul wrote to the Romans about these truths:

He will give everlasting life to those who search for glory, honor, and immortality by persisting in doing what is good. But he will bring anger and fury on those who, in selfish pride, refuse to believe the truth and who follow what is wrong. There will be suffering and distress for every person who does evil, for Jews first and Greeks as well (Romans 2:7-9 God's Word).

The destinations are completely different for the believer and for the unbeliever. The believer will receive everlasting life in the presence of the Lord. However, only suffering and distress await the unbeliever. This is the righteous judgment of God.

10. God's Righteousness Is Compared To Humanity's Unrighteousness

The righteousness of the Lord is compared with the unrighteousness of human beings. Daniel the prophet said the following:

Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you (Daniel 9:7 NIV).

There is a great gulf between the righteousness of God, and the unrighteousness of the human race. We are separated from Him because of our unrighteous nature.

11. The Gospel Reveals God's Righteousness

The gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ reveals the righteousness of God. Paul wrote to the Romans about this important truth:

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life" (Romans 1:16,17 NLT).

The righteous of God is made known through the message of Jesus Christ to the world. It is by faith in Christ that we too become righteous. However, our righteousness is given to us by Christ—we certainly do not earn it. Our responsibility is to believe.

12. God's Righteousness Was Satisfied By The Death Of Christ

God's righteousness was satisfied when the penalty for the sins of the world was put upon Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote about how Jesus took the punishment each and every one of us so richly deserve:

For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus (Romans 3:25,26 NLT).

The good news of Jesus Christ reveals the righteousness of God. Believers are declared righteous because of the faithfulness of Christ.

13. God Will Reward The Righteous

God promises to reward those who have been faithful to Him. The psalmist wrote the following about this wonderful promise:

Let the evil within wicked people come to an end, but make the righteous person secure, O righteous God who examines thoughts and emotions. My shield is God above, who saves those whose motives are decent. God is a fair judge, a God who is angered by injustice every day (Psalm 7:9-11 God's Word).

God, the righteous Judge, has promised that He vindicate His people. Indeed, He will reward the righteous and judge the evil.

There Is A Prize Waiting For The Believer In Jesus Christ

The Apostle Paul wrote of a reward that was awaiting him upon his death. He gave them triumphant words to Timothy:

The prize that shows I have God's approval is now waiting for me. The Lord, who is a fair judge, will give me that prize on that day. He will give it not only to me but also to everyone who is eagerly waiting for him to come again (2 Timothy 4:8 God's Word).

There is a prize awaiting all of us who have trusted Him. This prize will be given out by the Lord—the fair or righteous Judge.

The Righteous God Does Not Forget Our Work For Him

The writer to the Hebrews noted that God remembered the work of the righteous. Indeed, He promised that He will forget our work:

God is fair. He won't forget what you've done or the love you've shown for him. You helped his holy people, and you continue to help them (Hebrews 6:10 God's Word).

The Message says:

God doesn't miss anything. He knows perfectly well all the love you've shown him by helping needy Christians, and that you keep at it (Hebrews 6:10 MsgB).

The Lord always takes notice of the work of those who are righteous. Our work for Him is never forgotten.

14. Jesus Christ Will Rule The World In Righteousness

Scripture says that God will someday rule the world in righteousness through the Person of Jesus Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews said:

But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom” (Hebrews 1:8 NRSV).

Righteous will be the hallmark of the coming kingdom of God.

The psalmist declared that God’s throne is established, or founded, on the righteousness and justice of God:

Your throne is founded on two strong pillars—righteousness and justice. Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants (Psalm 89:14 NLT).

The righteousness of God is indeed an important topic of Scripture. Studying it can help us better appreciate who God is, as well as what He does. Furthermore, it will help us ordering the priorities of our lives. Like Him, we want to act righteously toward all others.

Summary To Question 37 Is God Righteous?

The Bible emphasizes that the God of Scripture is a righteous God. God’s righteousness, or justice, is an attribute that leads Him to do only those things that are right. He never does anything wrong. Indeed, it is impossible for Him to do anything unrighteous.

Therefore, humanity cannot correct His mistakes because He makes no mistakes. We should never assume that we know better than Him. In other words, we should never “second guess” His decisions.

Consequently, the God of the Bible does not need to explain His actions to anyone. Indeed, who do we think we are that He owes us some explanation of what He does do, or what He does not do? He is answerable to nobody—whether it be angel, human or any other created being.

We also find that whenever He deals with humanity He deals righteously. In fact, the Scripture places a huge emphasis on the reliable, or fair, dealings of the Lord with the human race. He always treats us fairly and judges us righteously. He is never wrong in His judgments or unfair in His treatment.

Since God is a righteous God, He must judge sin. The Bible teaches that His righteousness is shown through His judgment of evil. Indeed, God is no less righteous when He is a God of judgment—the One who sends sinners away from His presence for all eternity.

Along this line we find that God’s righteousness is compared to the unrighteousness of humans. His perfection in character and actions is compared to our imperfections in these areas. The contrast is obvious.

The gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the righteousness of God. God righteously forgives the sins of those who trust Christ, as well as crediting

us with the His righteousness. This is the good news of the gospel. We are now “in Christ.”

The Scripture speaks of a reward that is waiting someday for those who have believed in Jesus Christ and who have faithfully served Him. It will be given out by the Lord, the righteous Judge.

Someday the Lord will rule the entire universe with absolute righteousness. This is indeed a wonderful day in which we can all look forward to.

Question 38

In What Specific Ways Does God Deal Righteously With Humanity

The Bible declares that the God of Scripture is righteous—He always does what is right. In addition, it teaches that He has dealt righteously toward humanity in a number of specific ways. They include the following.

1. He Clears The Innocent And Judges The Guilty

In the Word of God, we find that the Lord enacts His justice by clearing those who are innocent and judging the guilty. We read about this in the Book of Isaiah:

He will judge the poor justly. He will make fair decisions for the humble people on earth. He will strike the earth with a rod from his mouth. He will kill the wicked with the breath from his lips (Isaiah 11:4 God's Word).

The Lord knows those who are innocent, and He knows the ones who are the guilty. The guilty will be judged.

2. He Pardons Those Who Confess

God pardons those who confess their sin to Him. In one of the psalms, it records that David prayed for personal forgiveness. Among other things he said:

Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness (Psalm 51:14 NIV).

God forgave David for his terrible sins of adultery and murder.

John the Apostle wrote about the need for believers to confess their sin. He said that God will forgive our sins when they are confessed:

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9 NRSV).

It is important that believers acknowledge their sin before the Lord. He is certainly aware of it.

3. The Lord Punishes Those Who Sin

The Bible also says that the Lord chastises, or punishes, His people when they sin. The prophet Amos recorded God saying:

From among all the families on the earth, I chose you alone. That is why I must punish you for all your sins (Amos 3:2 NLT).

Sin is punished by God. This includes the sins of those who are His people. Since the Lord has a special love for those who belong to Him, He does not let them get away with sin.

4. God Delivers His People From Trouble

The Bible says that God saves His people from trouble. Indeed, the prophet Isaiah the prophet records the Lord saying that He will put to shame those who are the enemies of His righteousness:

They will say of me, “In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.” All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult (Isaiah 45:24,25 NIV).

Isaiah also recorded God saying that salvation will be given to His people. It will not be delayed by anything:

I'll bring my righteousness near; it isn't far away. My salvation will not be delayed. I'll provide salvation for Zion and bring my glory to Israel (Isaiah 46:13 God's Word).

God has promised that He will deliver His own people from trouble—in His perfect timing.

5. God Gives Victory To Those Who Trust Him

The Lord gives His servants victory. After the final victory over evil, God will live with His people in a new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells. Peter wrote of this coming day. He put it this way:

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13 NKJV).

We can look forward to a world in which righteousness dwells.

6. He Provides Righteousness Through Jesus Christ

God not only deals righteously with His people; we also find that He requires righteousness from them. The righteousness that God gives believers is through the Person of Jesus Christ, God the Son. Paul wrote:

But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work (Romans 4:5 NLT).

Those who trust in Christ are declared righteous or made righteous through Him. This is a judicial act on the part of God. It does not mean that we immediately become perfect. Instead, we become righteous in the sight of God because we are credited with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The righteousness of God, with respect to salvation, is that righteousness that is credited to every believer. Again, Paul wrote to the Romans:

We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done (Romans 3:22 NLT).

What a great thought! No matter who we are, or what we have done, we can be forgiven of our sin by a holy God.

Since Christ Himself is righteous, He makes all those who trust in Him righteous before God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom (1 Corinthians 1:30 NLT).

We are now accepted in God's presence because of His sacrifice on our behalf.

Finally, we read of Paul saying that the sinless Jesus became an offering for sin so that we could be made right in our relationship with God. He put it this way to the Corinthians:

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT).

Consequently, all believers have been declared righteous through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, from examining the Scripture, we discover God's righteousness is displayed in a number of different ways to the human race.

Summary To Question 38
In What Specific Ways Does God
Deal Righteously With Humanity?

The God of the Bible is a righteous God. Scripture teaches that God has dealt righteously with humanity in a number of specific ways. They include the following.

For one thing, we are told that the Lord righteously clears the innocent but judges the guilty. The innocent ones are vindicated and the guilty are exposed.

In addition, God pardons those who confess their sins. Indeed, when we admit to Him that we have sinned, He has promised to forgive us and restore us.

However, He punishes those who remain in sin. The Scripture is clear on this subject. Those who remain in sin will experience the punishment of God.

We are also told that the Lord delivers His people from trouble. Since all of us have our troubles, this promise is especially comforting. When we are in trouble He has promised to help us if we call upon Him for that help.

Ultimately, the Lord gives victory to those who trust Him. His salvation or rescuing of us is always in His timing, never ours.

Finally, He provides His righteousness for those who believe in Jesus Christ. We trade our sin for His perfect righteousness. Since Jesus took the punishment we deserve, we do not have to suffer for our sins. What a fantastic offer this is!

These are some of righteous ways in which a holy God deals with sinful humanity.

Question 39

In What Sense Is God Jealous?

The Bible says that God is a jealous God. However, to many of us, jealousy is usually an attribute that is not to be desired. Therefore, it is important to understand the sense in which the God of the Bible is a jealous God. From Scripture we learn the following.

1. His Is Not Like Human Jealousy

The jealousy of God is not the same as human jealousy. God's jealousy is a "godly" jealousy. It has the idea of protection for His people. Paul wrote of such a thing. He said:

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2 NRSV).

While jealousy is usually thought to be a negative thing, the same thing is not true with godly jealousy. The word jealousy is always used in a positive way in Scripture when it refers to God—never in a negative way.

2. He Is Jealous Of The Worship Of False Gods

Scripture often records God being jealous of the worship of false gods, or idols. In the Ten Commandments we read:

Never make your own carved idols or statues that represent any creature in the sky, on the earth, or in the water. Never worship them or serve them, because I, the LORD your God, am a God who does not tolerate rivals. I punish children for their parents' sins to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me (Exodus 20:4,5 God's Word).

God makes it clear that He will tolerate no rivals—because He has no rivals.

Later, in the Book of Exodus, we again read that the Lord told Moses that no other gods were to be worshipped:

You must worship no other gods, but only the LORD, for he is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you (Exodus 34:14 NLT).

Interestingly, we are told that the Lord is passionate about His relationship with His people. This is why He commands them not to worship these false gods—which are non-existent.

Moses later described the Lord as being a jealous God:

For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God (Deuteronomy 4:24 NIV).

He is jealous for His people because He does not want them to worship these false gods.

Moses said that the Lord was furious when Israel worshipped foreign gods:

They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols (Deuteronomy 32:16 NIV).

Any type of false worship is condemned by the Lord in the strongest of terms.

3. He Is Jealous For The Promised Land

The Bible says that the Lord is jealous for the land that He gave to the descendants of Abraham—the Promised Land. We read in the Book of Joel:

Then the LORD became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people (Joel 2:18 NRSV).

The Land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants is of great concern to the Lord. Indeed, He has a special interest in it.

4. The Lord Is Jealous Of His Name

The Lord is also protective, or jealous, of His name and honor. His name is another way of speaking of His Person or character. He has said:

For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for why should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another (Isaiah 48:11 NRSV).

The Lord gives stern warnings to those who profane His holy name. Indeed, profaning the name of the Lord shows disrespect for His Holy character. God will certainly not tolerate this!

5. The Bible Speaks Of God's Jealous Anger

The Bible says that the Lord actually has a jealous anger. We read the following in the Book of Ezekiel:

I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger (Ezekiel 16:38 NIV).

His jealous anger results in punishment of sin. The prophet Nahum wrote about this. He explained it in this manner:

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies (Nahum 1:2 NIV).

The jealous God takes vengeance on those who sin against Him and His Word.

Therefore, from a study of Scripture, we find that God's jealousy is certainly different from ours. Consequently, we cannot compare human jealousy with godly jealousy.

Summary To Question 39
In What Sense Is God Jealous?

The Bible says that God is a jealous God. However, when we think of jealousy we usually think of something which is selfish or evil. How then can there be such a thing as a godly jealousy?

We can make the following comments about God's jealousy.

To begin with, we must realize that the jealousy of the Lord is not the same as human jealousy. The jealousy of the Lord is a godly jealousy in that He looks after His own in a protective or jealous way. This is what the term means when applied to the Lord.

Since He is protective of His people, the Lord is jealous when they worship other gods. Again, this is not in the same sense as human jealousy. Rather He is looking after the best interest of those who are wasting their time giving allegiance to things which are non-existent.

The special land, the Promised Land, is also something for which God is passionately concerned about. Indeed, He has made this Land special for a special people. When it is profaned with sin and idolatry it is something which causes Him to have a godly concern or jealousy.

The Lord is also protective, or jealous of His holy name. He will not allow Himself to be defamed—or for others to take the glory that is rightfully His.

Finally, we read of a jealous anger of the Lord. This results in the judgment of sin. Scripture gives us many examples of God's righteous anger or jealousy toward sin. In these cases, His "jealousy" is another way of saying His passionate concern. He hates sin and thus He must judge it.

This sums up the various ways which Scripture speaks of the jealousy of God. As is clearly evident, it is not the same as human jealousy.

Question 40

Is God A Judge?

The God of the Bible is a God of love. There does not seem to be too many people who have a problem with this.

However, this is not all there is to the story. The Bible also says that the God of the Bible is a God of judgment. This attribute of God is not nearly as popular as His attribute of “love.” Yet, the fact that He is a Judge is not in conflict with the idea that He is also a God of love.

We need to make a number of points about this most important of topics.

1. God Cannot Tolerate Sin

The God of the Bible is holy—He cannot tolerate sin. Consequently, there must be some way to judge the wrongdoing on the part of humankind. God’s holiness demands justice for sins that are committed. Indeed, it was our sin that separated us from the holiness of God. God’s Word says:

But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore (Isaiah 59:2 NLT).

Sin cuts people off from having a relationship with the Lord. To bring people back into that relationship, sin must be judged. Someone has to pay the penalty.

2. The Judgment Of Sin: The Penalty Of Our Sins Was Placed Upon Christ

The penalty has been paid. This is the good news, the gospel. Jesus Christ came into our world to pay that penalty—to die on our behalf so that we do not have to suffer for our sins.

This is why we find that God the Father placed the penalty of the sins of the world upon Jesus Christ. Indeed, our sin was so horrible to the point where God the Father was unable to look upon His Son when He was crucified on Calvary’s cross. This was described in Matthew:

And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46 NRSV).

At that moment, the penalty for the sins of the world was placed upon Jesus. He was separated from God the Father while receiving the punishment we so richly deserved.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about Jesus Christ being a sin offering for us. He put it this way:

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT).

The One who never sinned became a sin offering on our behalf. The holiness of God has been satisfied with the death of Jesus Christ. We can now enter into God's presence based upon the sacrifice Christ made upon the cross.

3. God Has Judged Both Individuals And Nations

Judgment, therefore, is something which a holy God does. Indeed, from Scripture, we find that the future judgment of God for sin will be on both an individual and a national level. He will judge individuals for private sins, and nations for their corporate sins.

In fact, Jesus spoke of judgment against the inhabitants of certain cities. Matthew records it in the following manner:

Then he began to reproach the towns where most of his mighty deeds had been done, since they had not repented. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And as for you, Capernaum: 'Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld.' For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:20-24 NLT).

These cities which had seen the miracles of our Lord and still did not repent will be judged to a harsher standard than the ancient cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. However, while these ancient cities will be judged with a less harsh standard, they will be judged.

Jesus also spoke of the judgment of individuals. In one instance, He did this through a parable.

We read about this in Matthew:

And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen' (Matthew 22:12-14 NRSV).

The one who came to the wedding feast without a wedding garment was judged. This is one of the many instances which teach that those who do not belong to the Lord will be sent into outer darkness. Individuals will be judged.

4. He Is The Righteous Judge

We also learn that the Lord is a righteous judge. He is fair. Moses emphasized this when he described the Lord in the following way:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes (Deuteronomy 10:17 NIV).

You cannot bribe this Judge and He will not show partiality to anyone. In the clearest of terms, the Bible emphasizes that He is a fair or just Judge.

Later in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses also wrote about the ways of God. He emphasized that they are always perfect. We read the following words:

The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he (Deuteronomy 32:4 NRSV).

The point is simple—God’s judgments are always true.

5. The Will Be A Final Judgment

Scripture speaks of a final judgment for the wicked where the Lord, the righteous Judge, will have the righteous and unrighteous before Him. The Book of Revelation describes this awesome event:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15 NKJV).

While God is a Judge—He is a righteous judge. His judgments will always be fair. This is something which we can take much comfort in.

Summary To Question 40: Is God A Judge?

The Bible says that God is a God of love. This is not usually disputed—neither does this idea bother very many people. However, the Bible also teaches that the God Scripture is also a God of justice. The idea that God will judge sinners does bother people! However, the fact that God is both a loving God and a righteous God is not contradictory.

God is a holy God. He cannot tolerate sin. Therefore, the sins of humankind must be paid for.

The good news is that God the Son, Jesus Christ, came into the world to solve the sin problem. The penalty for the sins of the world was placed upon Him at Calvary. He died in our place so that we do not have to suffer for our sins. Sins must be paid for and Jesus paid that price.

While the Lord offers the free gift of salvation to all who believe, not everyone accepts His offer. For those who reject God's offer of salvation there awaits a judgment. Scripture speaks of judgment in a number of different ways.

The Bible speaks of the Lord judging the nations at the return of Christ. The sheep, the believers, will be separated from the goats, the unbelievers.

We also have the illustration of God judging entire cities. Jesus spoke of the judgment of certain cities that refused to believe in Him.

Scripture also stresses that judgment will be on an individual basis. The people of the various nations and cities will be judged on an individual basis. The righteous will be separated from the unrighteous.

The Bible also speaks of a final judgment for the wicked. Those who have rejected Christ will be banished from His presence for all eternity.

In sum, the God of the Bible is a loving God, who is also a God who judges. However, the Lord would rather not judge people. Indeed, judgment is His "strange" work.

Question 41

What Is The Wrath Of God?

The God of the Bible has many characteristics or attributes. Among other things, the Scripture teaches that God is a God of wrath. What exactly does this mean? What is the wrath of God? Who will receive His wrath?

The Wrath Of God Defined: God's Righteous Anger

Wrath can be defined as God's righteous anger. God loves what is right but hates what is wrong. Scripture has much to say about the wrath of God. This includes the following.

1. The Wrath Of God Is Taught In The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, we find that the wrath of the Lord was often directed against the nation Israel. When the Lord saw the people worshipping idols, after He had miraculously delivered them from Egypt, He became intensely angry. The Lord then spoke to Moses:

And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you" (Exodus 32:9,10 ESV).

His anger was intense to the place where He was willing to destroy the entire nation for turning their backs upon Him.

The Old Testament records a number of instances where God's righteous anger was directed against the nation of Israel. Moses reminded them of this. He wrote:

Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:7,8 ESV).

Again we have the record of God being angry to the point of wiping out the entire nation for their constant rebellion.

God warned Israel what would happen if they continued to disobey Him. This is also recorded in Deuteronomy:

And the next generation, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, will say, when they see the afflictions of that land and the sicknesses with which the Lord has made it sick—the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and wrath (Deuteronomy 29:22,23 ESV).

These people certainly had an ample warning. Time after time the Lord told them of what would happen for their persistent disobedience. Yet they continually refused to listen.

This rebellion continued in the history of the nation. We read in the Book of Kings about the Lord's anger toward the kingdom of Judah. Upon discovering the Book of the Law in the temple, King Josiah said the following:

The LORD must be furious with me and everyone else in Judah, because our ancestors did not obey the laws written in this book. Go find out what the LORD wants us to do (2 Kings 22:13 CEV).

Again we see another example of God's holy anger, His wrath. It is clear that God's wrath is revealed in the Old Testament.

2. The New Testament Speaks Of God's Wrath

The New Testament also speaks of the wrath of God. It makes it plain that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will suffer the judgment of God.

John wrote.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36 ESV).

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

Everyone who has faith in the Son has eternal life. But no one who rejects him will ever share in that life, and God will be angry with them forever (John 3:36 CEV).

God will indeed be forever angry or wrathful toward that person who rejects the gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul also wrote about the wrath of God. To the church at Rome, he made the following remark:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Romans 1:18 ESV).

The Contemporary English Version translates the verse in this manner:

From heaven God shows how angry he is with all the wicked and evil things that sinful people do to crush the truth (Romans 1:18 CEV).

God's wrath is directed toward those who willingly and knowingly reject His truth. In this verse, Paul says they are actively suppressing His truth.

Paul also wrote to the Thessalonians about God's wrath. He said the following:

By hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last (1 Thessalonians 2:16 NRSV).

The wrath of God will certainly come upon those who do not believe in Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Revelation, we again read about God's wrath coming upon those who dwell upon the earth. John wrote:

And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16 NLT).

As is true in the Old Testament, the New Testament speaks of God's wrath. There is no doubt that it is a subject which the Bible teaches.

God Hates All Evil

God gets angry at sin. It must be stressed that hatred of evil is not sinful. The Bible is clear that God hates all evil. The writer to the Hebrews said:

You love what is right and hate what is wrong. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else (Hebrews 1:9 NLT).

God loves the good and hates the evil.

In Zechariah, we have another reference to God hating evil. The Lord Himself declared His hatred for evil. The Bible says:

"Do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD (Zechariah 8:17 NIV).

If the God of the Bible says that He hates something, then we would do well to pay attention to what He says. If He hates it, then so should we. Furthermore, we should not participate in the evil that he hates.

Jesus Bore The Wrath Of God On Calvary's Cross

On Calvary's cross, Jesus took the wrath of God that each of us deserve. Paul explained it this way:

For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when

he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus (Romans 3:25,26 NLT).

Jesus took upon Himself the penalty for the sins of each of us. He was innocent, we are guilty.

Wrath Is Something Believers Will Not Experience

The good news is that those who have believed in Jesus Christ will not experience the wrath of God. Paul wrote:

For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9 NRSV).

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

God doesn't intend to punish us, but to have our Lord Jesus Christ save us (1 Thessalonians 5:9 CEV).

The wrath of God will only be experienced by unbelievers. Our sins have already been judged by Christ's death on the cross.

Paul wrote:

We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and by nature we were children under wrath, as the others were also (Ephesians 2:3 HCSB).

The Contemporary English Version reads:

Once we were also ruled by the selfish desires of our bodies and minds. We had made God angry, and we were going to be punished like everyone else (Ephesians 2:3 CEV).

Indeed, Paul told the Thessalonians that Jesus Christ will deliver believers from the coming wrath of God. He put it this way:

And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10 NKJV).

It is clear that wrath is something which believers will not face.

The Lord Is Patient In His Anger

The Bible also emphasizes that Lord is patient with those who trust Him. His anger does not last forever. The psalmist wrote:

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever (Psalm 103:8,9 NRSV).

This is good news for those who love Him.

In the New Testament, we find the Apostle Paul writing about God's patience toward the believer. He wrote:

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Romans 2:4 NKJV).

This is a comforting thought.

The Lord Is Waiting For Unbelievers To Repent

One of the reasons that God does not immediately judge people is that His desire is for them to repent. Peter wrote:

The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9 HCSB).

The wrath of God is delayed for those who are still living in sin. However, His patience with them does not last forever. Once they die in a state of unbelief, then His eternal wrath awaits them.

In sum, the wrath of God, His righteous anger, is taught in Scripture. It is a sobering reminder that God always judges sin.

Summary To Question 41 What Is The Wrath Of God?

There are many doctrines that believers enjoy studying. However, the wrath of God is usually not one of them. God's wrath can be defined as His righteous anger. The Bible says that God is indeed angry at sin.

The wrath of God is taught in both testaments. From the very first page of the Bible, until the last, we find God's anger directed at those who rebel against Him.

It must be emphasized that anger at sin is not sin. In fact, there is a time when it is appropriate to be angry. When we are confronted with a sinful situation, it is proper to display righteous anger. The Lord certainly did this.

Scripture says that God wrath, or righteous anger, will eternally be placed on those who do not believe in Him. They will be forever separated from His Holy presence as they experience His wrath.

On the other hand, those who have believed in Jesus Christ will not be objects of His wrath. Indeed, God has destined us for salvation, not wrath. There is no condemnation for those who are "in Christ."

The Bible also says that the Lord is patient to those whom He is angry with. This includes believers. He desires us to repent of our sins and turn to Him.

If we do not, then He will then discipline us. He does this because He loves us.

He is also patient with unbelievers. Indeed, the Lord waits for them to repent. Yet His patience will not last forever. Repentance is only possible in this life. So, once a person dies, repentance from sin is not possible. Only the wrath of God remains for them.

In sum, God's wrath, or righteous anger, is displayed at sin. Consequently, it should encourage us to do only those things which are pleasing to Him—so that we do not experience His wrath.

For the believer, this means following the commands of Jesus Christ. For the unbeliever, this means turning to Christ in faith for forgiveness of sin. When this occurs the wrath of God will not be displayed.

Question 42

Is God A Merciful God?

Yes. Although the God of the Bible is a God of justice, He is also a God of mercy. The Bible says that God's mercy is an attribute that He possesses.

Mercy Defined: God's Goodness To Those Who Are In Trouble

Mercy can be defined as God's divine goodness that He exercises toward His creatures. This occurs when people are in trouble or distress. The mercy of God is expressed in a number of ways. The Bible says the following things about the mercy of God.

1. God Is Rich In Mercy Toward Humanity

The Bible speaks of God being "rich in mercy." King David understood this as he spoke to the prophet Gad:

David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men" (2 Samuel 24:14 NIV).

The God of the Bible is a God who is rich in mercy toward the human race. This is truly a comforting thought for those of us who trust Him.

2. God Showed His Mercy Toward Israel: The Chosen People

God has also been merciful to the nation Israel—His chosen people. Jeremiah the prophet recorded the Lord speaking about this mercy:

Go, proclaim this message toward the north: Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD, I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful, declares the LORD, I will not be angry forever (Jeremiah 3:12 NIV).

The Lord Himself declares that He is a merciful God. Since God never lies, then He must indeed be a merciful God.

Isaiah the prophet wrote about God's mercy toward the nation of Israel. He wrote about abandoning the people, and then bringing them back:

For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back (Isaiah 54:7 NIV).

God has indeed been merciful and compassionate to His people.

3. God Showed Mercy In Sending His Son Into The World

The mercy of God reached its highest point when He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, testified to this at the birth of his son John. He said John would do the following:

You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God's tender mercy, the light from heaven is about to break upon us (Luke 1:77,78 NLT).

The message of John would be a message of hope and mercy. There would be forgiveness of sin through Christ, the coming Messiah. This came to pass as John testified. Indeed, the greatest act of God's mercy toward humanity was sending His Son into the world to show humanity His great mercy.

4. Mercy Is The Basis Of Our Salvation

We are saved because of God's mercy. In his letter to Titus, Paul emphasized this wonderful truth. He said:

He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5 NET).

We do not save ourselves. We are saved because of His great mercy.

When the prophet Daniel prayed, he acknowledged that God was indeed a merciful and forgiving God. He said:

LORD God, you are merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against you (Daniel 9:9 CEV).

This is a truth which is emphasized throughout Scripture. God is a God of mercy and forgiveness.

The psalmist also acknowledged his sin before the Lord. In doing so, he experienced God's mercy and forgiveness:

So I confessed my sins and told them all to you. I said, "I'll tell the Lord each one of my sins." Then you forgave me and took away my guilt (Psalm 32:5 CEV).

Forgiveness of our sins is rooted in the mercy of God.

5. Mercy Is Often Linked With Grace

In Scripture, we find mercy often linked with the grace of God. Grace can be defined as "unmerited favor." It is getting something that we do not deserve.

Indeed, the forgiveness of sin is something that none of us deserve.

Yet God has had mercy on humanity, and has forgiven those who have believed in Him through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote:

God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift from God. It's not the result of anything you've done, so no one can brag about it (Ephesians 2:8,9 God's Word).

Salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace. There is nothing we can do to earn it—and we certainly have not deserved it!

6. God Shows His Mercy Toward The Church

God has showed mercy toward the members of the New Testament church. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians:

Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 CEV).

The merciful God is a comforting God. Indeed, He allows us to comfort others with the comfort we have received when we were hurting.

Those who trust in Him are recipients of His mercy in a special way. The writer to the Hebrews told believers how to receive God's mercy:

So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it (Hebrews 4:16 NLT).

The believers in Jesus Christ have received God's mercy.

7. Mercy Is The Basis Of Hope

The mercy of God is the basis of hope for the believer. The psalmist wrote of his hope in the unfailing love of God. He said:

But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever (Psalm 52:8 NIV).

The hope of the believer is that we will receive God's mercy.

8. He Gives Mercy On Those Who Are Afflicted

God grants mercy, or His divine goodness, on those who are afflicted. Isaiah the prophet triumphantly wrote of the comfort the Lord gives:

Sing with joy, you heavens! Rejoice, you earth! Break into shouts of joy, you mountains. The Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his humble people (Isaiah 49:13 God's Word).

The God of Scripture is a God of comfort.

In the life and ministry of Jesus we find that there were two blind men who appealed to Jesus for mercy. Matthew records the incident as follows:

After Jesus left the girl's home, two blind men followed along behind him, shouting, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" (Matthew 9:27 NLT)

Jesus, God the Son, was merciful to them and healed them of their blindness.

9. The Mercy Is Given According To His Will

The Bible is also clear that God grants mercy according to His will. God mercifully allowed Moses to see His glory. In the Book of Exodus, we read the following:

The LORD answered: All right. I am the LORD, and I show mercy and kindness to anyone I choose. I will let you see my glory and hear my holy name (Exodus 33:19 CEV).

Notice that the Lord has mercy upon those whom He chooses.

Commenting on this statement in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul emphasized that God has mercy on those whom He desires. He wrote:

Therefore, God's choice does not depend on a person's desire or effort, but on God's mercy (Romans 9:16 God's Mercy).

God gives mercy to people as He desires. As He is God, this is His right.

10. Believers Are To Imitate God's Mercy

We serve a merciful God. Consequently, those who believe in Jesus Christ are to be merciful to others. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus emphasized that God blesses those who show mercy:

God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy (Matthew 5:7 NLT).

Mercy is something that believers receive from the Lord. In turn, we ought to imitate the Lord and show mercy to others.

Summary To Question 42: Is God A Merciful God?

The Bible says that the God of the Bible is a God of mercy. What is mercy? Mercy is not getting what we do deserve, judgment, and getting what we do not deserve, heaven. It is God's divine goodness that is given to people who are in distress.

The mercy of God is a major theme of Scripture. He gives us specific examples of where He has extended His mercy.

First, the Bible says that God is rich in mercy toward the human race. Scripture constantly testifies to this truth in both testaments.

In addition, God has had mercy on the nation Israel, His chosen people. When Israel sinned against the Lord, He did not reject them. Indeed, we find that time after time the Lord extended His mercy to this wayward people.

God's mercy is also the basis of our hope in this present age. His ultimate act of mercy was sending His Son into the world. We can enter into a right relationship with a holy God because of the merciful act of God becoming a human being in the Person of Jesus Christ.

God has also shown mercy on the New Testament church. In fact, there are numerous examples recorded for us of God's mercy toward New Testament believers. Those of us who know Christ personally can also attest to that mercy.

The Bible also says that God has mercy on those who are afflicted. He helps those who are hurting. Indeed, He is called the "God of all comfort."

The Bible teaches that basis of our eternal salvation is the mercy of God. Scripture often links mercy with God's grace. We are saved because of His great mercy—not because of anything good that we can do.

We also find that the mercy of God is given according to His will. In other words, He chooses whom He will show mercy. As God, this is His right to do this.

All of these things testify to the fact that God is rich in mercy. Consequently, those who serve Him should be merciful to others.

Question 43

In What Sense Is God Patient?

The Bible speaks of “patience” as one of the attributes of God. While human beings can and do show patience with one another, our patience is always imperfect, while the patience of God is perfect. Therefore, it is important to discover what the word patience means from God’s perspective? In what sense, is He patient?

The Bible Says God Is Patient

Patience has the idea of waiting without speaking or acting. Paul calls God the “God of endurance.” He wrote:

Now may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you agreement with one another, according to Christ Jesus (Romans 15:5 HCSB).

We find the patience of God exercised in both testaments. The following observations about God’s patience should be made.

1. The Patience Of God In The Old Testament

We have a number of examples of God’s patience that are recorded in the Old Testament. Specifically, He was patient with the people before the flood, He was also patient with the nation Israel while they were in Egyptian bondage, and He showed patience with Israel while they wandered in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. A number of lessons can be learned from each of these examples.

A. God Was Patient Before He Sent The Flood

The Bible says the wickedness on the earth got to such a place that God wanted to destroy all humanity.

We read the following in the Book of Genesis:

The LORD saw how bad the people on earth were and that everything they thought and planned was evil. He was very sorry that he had made them, and he said, “I’ll destroy every living creature on earth! I’ll wipe out people, animals, birds, and reptiles. I’m sorry I ever made them” (Genesis 6:5-7 CEV).

Therefore, He decided to send a flood to destroy life on earth. Before God sent the flood, He decided to save one family from the coming judgment—the family of Noah.

The Bible says:

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8 ESV).

Though God decided to destroy the world with a flood, He did not send it immediately. In fact, He waited some one hundred and twenty years.

Scripture speaks of the Lord's patience before the Flood in this manner:

They had disobeyed God while Noah was building the boat, but God had been patient with them. Eight people went into that boat and were brought safely through the flood (1 Peter 3:20 CEV).

Judgment was certain, but God was in no hurry to bring it about. As Noah built the boat, and preached the message of God's coming judgment to those upon the earth, people still had the chance to turn from their sins and ask God for forgiveness. Unfortunately, the message of Noah was not believed—except by members of his own family.

B. God Patiently Waited Four Hundred Years Before Israel Went On Their Way To The Promised Land

In another example of God's patience, we find that He promised Abraham that his descendants would enter the Land of Promise. Yet, it would be four hundred years before this was to be fulfilled. The Bible says:

Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13 NIV)

Again, the plan of God was set, but there was no rush to complete it. The people would have to spend a number of years as slaves in Egypt before they would see the Promised Land. Indeed, some four hundred years.

C. God Patiently Let The People Wander For Forty Years Before Entering The Land

Even when the people were set free from the bondage of Egypt, they did not immediately enter into the Promised Land. In fact, the generation that had left Egypt wandered in the wilderness for some forty years.

They did not believe that the God who set them free from Egyptian bondage would help them defeat the people they saw in the land of Canaan.

Because of their unbelief, Scripture tells us that all of them over the age of twenty, except for Joshua and Caleb, died in the desert.

The New Testament explains it this way:

And who were those people who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Weren't they the ones Moses led out of Egypt? And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn't it the people who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when he vowed that they would never enter his place of rest? He was speaking to those who disobeyed him. So we see that they were

not allowed to enter his rest because of their unbelief (Hebrews 3:16-19 NLT)

Their unbelief kept an entire generation from entering the Promised Land. Again, God was in no hurry to fulfill His promises.

From these three Old Testament episodes, we discover that God has a plan for humanity and that plan will be carried out. However, the plan will be carried out according to God's timetable, not ours.

God is a patient God—who is in no hurry to accomplish His purposes.

2. The Patience Of God In The New Testament

We also find the patience of God expressed in the New Testament. In particular, this occurred in the life and ministry of Jesus, as well as the life of Saul of Tarsus.

A. Jesus Waited Thirty Years Before Beginning His Public Ministry

Jesus, as God the Son, came into our world according to the perfect timing of God the Father. We know that at the age of twelve, He recognized His calling. However, the Bible says it was not until Jesus was about the age of thirty before He began His ministry to the world.

Luke records His appearance to the world in the following manner:

When Jesus began to preach, he was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23 CEV).

From the age of twelve to the age of thirty, Jesus, fully knowing who He was, and what He was supposed to do, continued to wait patiently for the proper time to begin His public ministry. His patience teaches us a great lesson.

B. God Was Patient With Saul Before His Conversion

The Bible says that God was patient with Saul of Tarsus while he jailed and killed Christians. Upon his conversion, Saul became the Apostle Paul.

Later, Paul wrote of the patience and mercy that God had showed him:

I used to say terrible and insulting things about him [Jesus], and I was cruel. But he had mercy on me because I didn't know what I was doing, and I had not yet put my faith in him (1 Timothy 1:13 CEV).

Again, we find that God takes His time to complete His plan. He was in no hurry to complete what He had started in the life of Saul.

3. God Is Presently Showing His Patience In A Number Of Ways

There are a number of different ways in which God is presently patient with humanity. They are as follows.

A. God Is Patient With Injustice In The World

God hates the injustice that is presently found in our world. Yet it seems that He is doing nothing about it. However, this is not the case.

For example, find that when the martyrs in the Book of Revelation cry out to God to right the injustice, they are told to be patient for a short while. The Book of Revelation records this event as follows:

When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of everyone who had been killed for speaking God's message and telling about their faith. They shouted, "Master, you are holy and faithful! How long will it be before you judge and punish the people of this earth who killed us?" Then each of those who had been killed was given a white robe and told to rest for a little while. They had to wait until the complete number of the Lord's other servants and followers would be killed (Revelation 6:8-10 CEV).

The martyrs will be avenged in God's time. We are in a hurry—the Lord is not.

B. God Is Patient For His Name To Be Vindicated

God is waiting for His character, or name, to be vindicated. People deny that God exists, reject the idea that Jesus Christ is the one way to the one God, and ridicule the idea that Christ will come again. However, when Jesus Christ returns, punishment will come upon those who have rejected Him as their Savior. Paul wrote:

But God will use this persecution to show his justice. For he will make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering, and in his justice he will punish those who persecute you. And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power (2 Thessalonians 1:5-9 NLT).

Someday, He will vindicate Himself. Until that time, He is patient with humanity. Again, this is a great lesson for each of us.

C. God Is Patient, Waiting For Humans To Repent

God is patient with human beings who are presently in sin. For those who are practicing sin, God wants them to turn away from their sin and to Him.

The Bible says that God is patient because He wants people to repent. Peter wrote:

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent (2 Peter 3:9 NLT).

The reason as to why God does not judge these people is that He is waiting for them to repent.

Peter also wrote about the Lord's patience a few verses later. He put it this way:

Don't forget that the Lord is patient because he wants people to be saved (2 Peter 3:15 CEV).

While it may seem that the Lord is delaying the time of His return, His delay is actually a sign of His loving patience with sinful humanity. He keeps giving them chance after chance to repent of their sin.

**Conclusion: As God Has Been Patient With Humanity,
We Should Be Patient With Others**

There are lessons to be learned from the patience of God. As He has been patient with the human race, we should be patient with others. We are to reflect God's patience in our lives.

**Summary To Question 43
In What Sense Is God Patient?**

The Bible says that one of the attributes of the God of Scripture is His patience. This consists of God waiting before actually acting. Scripture is full of examples of the patience of the Lord.

God exercised His patience in the Old Testament period. We have the example with Noah and the people before the flood. God waited some one hundred and twenty years to send the flood while Noah was preaching about the coming judgment.

There is also the example of the children of Israel in bondage in Egypt. They had to wait four hundred years for their deliverance. However, as always, the promises of the Lord came true and they were set free from the bondage of slavery.

Yet, once they left the land they still had to wander some forty years in the desert before the promise was finally realized. In all of this, God was patient with His people.

There are also examples of God's patience recorded in the New Testament.

Indeed, Jesus waited patiently until age thirty before He began His public ministry. We know that He was conscious of His identity at age twelve. However, He waited another eighteen years before unveiling Himself to the world.

Saul of Tarsus persecuted those who believed in Jesus. In doing so, he thought that he was doing God's will. God was patient with him and eventually Saul was converted to Christ. This enemy of Christianity became the Apostle Paul—the greatest champion of the faith.

God is presently showing His patience in a number of ways. He is waiting to right the wrongs that His people are suffering. There will indeed come a time when they will be revenged.

Also, the Lord will vindicate His own name when He returns. Those who have denied Him will discover that He is indeed the only God who exists. While there are scoffers and doubters now, there will not be any when He returns.

Finally, we are told that the Lord is patient with sinners because He desires them to come to repentance.

As God has been patient with humanity, we, in turn, are to be patient with others. In doing so, we will reflect one of His attributes.

Question 44

Does God Have A Physical Or Material Body? (God's Spirituality)

One of the things that many people wonder about God is His form. Does He have a physical or material body? What does God look like?

There are those who reason that since human beings are made in the image of God, and that we have a body, then the God of the Bible must also have a body.

This however makes the mistake of assuming that the image of God is physical. It is not. Indeed, the Bible teaches that God does not have a body. Scripture teaches the following.

1. God Is Spirit: He Has No Physical Form

The Scriptures teach that God is spirit. Jesus said: "God is spirit" (John 4:24). By nature, God is a spirit-being. This is also known as God's "spirituality."

In whatever way a person defines spirit, the definition does not include a body of flesh and bones similar to what we have. This can be seen in an encounter Jesus had with His disciples after His resurrection from the dead. He said:

Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have (Luke 24:39 NRSV).

Jesus clearly said a spirit, or a ghost, does not have flesh and bones. God, therefore, being a spirit, does not have a physical form like humans. In fact, God has no material form or physical limitations at all.

2. God Is Invisible

A spirit is also invisible. God's spirit, therefore, cannot be seen by human beings. The Apostle Paul wrote about the invisible God:

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:17 NKJV).

The Lord is not merely the *only* God—He is also the invisible God.

No Mere Human Has Seen The Father

The Apostle John wrote that no one has ever seen God. He put it this way:

No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son the One who is at the Father's side— He has revealed Him (John 1:18 HCSB).

God is not able to be seen.

Jesus Has Seen The Father

Yet, the Bible says that God the Son has seen the Father. Jesus made this claim:

Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father (John 6:46 NKJV).

Jesus puts Himself in a unique position of saying that He has actually seen God the Father. This is one of the many ways in which the Bible says that Jesus is different from all other beings. Indeed, Jesus is God the Son!

God's Invisible Qualities Are Made Known Through Creation

The Apostle Paul testified that the Lord has invisible qualities that are made known through His creation. He wrote the following to the Romans:

From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God (Romans 1:20 NLT).

His invisible qualities are made known from the things which we can see.

He Is The Image Of The Invisible God

To the Colossians, Paul called Jesus Christ the image of the invisible God:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation (Colossians 1:15 NLT).

According to this statement, Jesus, God the Son, existed before anything else in the universe. Furthermore, He is supreme above all creation.

Nobody Can Enter His Presence

To Timothy, Paul again emphasized that no one could enter God's presence:

He [God] alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No one has ever seen him, nor ever will. To him be honor and power forever. Amen (1 Timothy 6:16 NLT).

We are unable to approach Him in our fallen human nature.

He Has No Physical Form

He is the unseen God who has no physical, or material, form. John the Apostle said it clear:

No one has ever seen God. (1 John 4:12 CEV).

Scripture also emphasizes that we love Him though we have not seen Him. Peter wrote:

You love Him, though you have not seen Him. And though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9 HCSB).

It is the united testimony of Scripture that humans have not seen the invisible God of Scripture.

3. He Is Not Subject To Human Limitations

As spirit, God is not subject to the limitations of a body as are human beings. He does not have any body parts—neither does He have human passions. In fact, God is not composed of any material elements. Therefore, He cannot be seen without our natural eyes or experienced by our natural senses. In the Book of Job, the question is raised:

Can you understand the mysteries surrounding God All-Powerful? They are higher than the heavens and deeper than the grave. So what can you do when you know so little (Job 11:7,8 CEV).

The answer is no. God's depths and limits are not discoverable.

4. God Did Not Allow The Making Of An Image Of Him

In addition, God specifically forbade His people to make idols or some type of image of Himself. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

A. The Ten Commandments Forbid Images Of The Lord

We read the following in the Ten Commandments:

Never have any other god. Never make your own carved idols or statues that represent any creature in the sky, on the earth, or in the water. Never worship them or serve them, because I, the LORD your God, am a God who does not tolerate rivals. I punish children for their parents' sins to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me (Exodus 20:3-5 God's Word).

The Lord will not tolerate any rivals to Himself. No idols should be made of Him, or of any false god. Idolatry is something which He hates.

Later, Moses again emphasized that the Lord did not want any type of physical image made of Him:

It was at that time that the LORD commanded me to issue the laws and regulations you must obey in the land you are about to enter and

occupy. “But be careful! You did not see the LORD’s form on the day he spoke to you from the fire at Mount Sinai. So do not corrupt yourselves by making a physical image in any form—whether of a man or a woman, an animal or a bird, a creeping creature or a fish. And when you look up into the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars - all the forces of heaven—don’t be seduced by them and worship them. The LORD your God designated these heavenly bodies for all the peoples of the earth. Remember that the LORD rescued you from the burning furnace of Egypt to become his own people and special possession; that is what you are today (Deuteronomy 4:14-20 NLT).

Since the Lord repeated what He had earlier said about images and idols, it is clear that He detests the making of such things.

We also read that God does not want to be compared to these non-existent idols. Isaiah the prophet wrote:

“Who will you compare Me to, or who is My equal?” asks the Holy One (Isaiah 40:25 HCSB).

Images of the Lord were condemned in the strongest of terms. He is a different being than every other life-form in the universe.

B. Images Limit And Misrepresent God

It is a sin to make an idol or image of God because it gives the impression that God is limited in some way. Since God has no physical form, or spatial dimensions, it is wrong to make an image of Him, and then assume that God is in that particular image in some special way.

To the contrary, He is everywhere present in the universe. Making an image or idol of Him does not make Him any more present. Indeed, it gives the wrong impression that God can be somehow limited to a human-made object.

The God of the Bible is intensely jealous of His character and has strong words to say about this practice:

Be careful that you don’t forget the promise that the Lord your God made to you. Don’t make your own carved idols or statues that represent anything the Lord your God has forbidden. The Lord your God is a raging fire, a God who does not tolerate rivals. (Deuteronomy 4:23,24 God’s Word).

Images cannot accurately represent the living God. Thus, we should never construct any type of image of Him with the belief that He somehow resides in it.

5. He Does Not Have A Shadowy Existence

There is an important point which we must make. The fact that God does not have any material form does not mean He lives in some shadowy

existence. God is a real Person with genuine existence. Yet His nature cannot be fully appreciated by the human mind, or described in an adequate manner by human language. We are limited in the things which we can understand about Him.

6. This Truth Is Difficult To Comprehend

The fact that God is a personal Spirit is difficult to comprehend. We wonder, “How can something be personal without being material?” While we cannot understand how this can be so, this is what the Scripture says concerning the nature of God.

Consequently, we must accept it by faith because this is the way in which God describes Himself.

7. Though God Is An Invisible Spirit, He Became A Human

When God the Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth two thousand years ago, He took upon Himself a human nature that included a human body. While seemingly, He will forever be in that body, His Divine nature is not material. His body is a human body, not a divine body.

Previously to His coming to earth, He did not possess a body. Indeed, as the eternal God, He did not need a body to exist in the unseen realm.

This sums up some of the biblical truths about the makeup of the God of Scripture. It is clear that He is made up of spirit rather than something physical.

Summary To Question 44

Does God Have A Physical, Or Material, Body? (God’s Spirituality)

Since humans have been made in the image of God, there are some people wrongly assume that God must have some physical form like us. Yet this is not what Scripture teaches. Indeed, the Bible says that God is spirit.

A spirit, by definition, is invisible. God, therefore, has no physical form. Thus, the invisible God of Scripture is not able to be perceived with the physical senses.

While we know that He is there, we cannot see Him. Indeed, the Bible says that we love Him though we have not seen Him.

Accordingly, the God of the Bible exists as a being that is not made up of any matter or substance. He has no parts, no length, and no width. He is not limited to any particular space.

This is one of the reasons that the Lord did not allow idols of Himself to be made. Images give the false impression that God can be confined to a certain space. God cannot be so confined.

As to how God can exist as a spirit, without any sort of body, is a divine mystery. It cannot be comprehended by us. Yet this is what the Bible teaches concerning God's basic essence. Consequently, we believe what we are taught because God does not lie to us.

While the Bible speaks of God as the invisible God, Jesus Christ, God the Son, took upon Himself human nature, which included a physical form, when He came to the earth.

However, He did not possess a divine body—He was fully human in all aspects, yet He was without sin. God the Son will keep this scarred body for all eternity as a reminder of what He did for us on the cross of Calvary.

Question 45

Why Do Certain Passages Seem To Teach That God Has A Body? (Anthropomorphisms)

The Bible says that God is “spirit.” Jesus said that a spirit does not have a physical form. Hence, God does not have any type of body.

Yet, there are passages in the Bible that seem to indicate that God does indeed possess a body. They include the following descriptions of Him.

1. Eyes

The Bible says that God has eyes. In Chronicles, we read of eyes going back and forth throughout the world:

The Lord’s eyes scan the whole world to find those whose hearts are committed to him and to strengthen them (2 Chronicles 16:9 God’s Word).

God’s eyes are said to be everywhere.

2. Arms

Scripture speaks of the arms of God. In fact, Moses wrote about how the Lord brought the people out of Egypt with an “outstretched arm.”

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day (Deuteronomy 5:15 NIV).

His outstretched arm is there to save His people.

3. Hands

The Bible records God speaking about His own hands:

I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices (Isaiah 65:2 NRSV)

The Lord has held out His hands to rebellious Israel.

4. Fingers

Scripture attributes fingers to God. Pharaoh’s magicians spoke of this when they saw the miracles that Moses and Aaron were doing:

And the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said (Exodus 8:19 NRSV).

The magicians of Pharaoh attributed the miracles of Moses to the finger of God.

5. Feet

The Bible also says that God has feet. The psalmist wrote:

You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet (Psalm 8:6 NIV).

God will place all of His enemies under His feet.

6. Face

In the Book of Exodus, we read of the face of God. The Bible said that the Lord spoke to Moses “face to face:”

The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent (Exodus 33:11 NIV).

Moses had a unique relationship with the Lord. In fact, he saw the face of God.

7. Lips, Tongue, Breath, Neck

In a passage in the Book of Isaiah, God is said to have lips, a tongue, breath, and a neck.

It says the following:

Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar, Burning with His anger, And His burden is heavy; His lips are full of indignation, And His tongue like a devouring fire. His breath is like an overflowing stream, Which reaches up to the neck, To sift the nations with the sieve of futility; And there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, Causing them to err (Isaiah 30:27,28 NKJV).

Lips, tongue, neck, and breath area attributed to the Lord.

One of Job’s three friends spoke of the lips of God. We read the following:

Oh, how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you (Job 11:5 NIV).

God is said to have lips to speak against those who do evil.

8. Back

The Bible speaks of the “back” of God. The Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah:

I will scatter them before the enemy like the east wind. I will show them [My] back and not [My] face on the day of their calamity (Jeremiah 18:17 HCSB).

The Lord has a backside.

9. Heart

We read that God has a heart. In the Book of Genesis, it says the following:

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain (Genesis 6:6 NIV).

God has a heart.

Does God Really Have A Body?

Do these verses mean to teach us that God has an actual body? No. These verses are not to be understood literally. They are known as anthropomorphisms—assigning human characteristics to God.

The descriptions are to be understood as metaphors that describe in finite human terms, the characteristics of the infinite God. Humankind can better understand and identify with God when He is described as having such things as an outstretched arm, eyes that see everywhere, and a mighty hand.

From these descriptions, we are able to gain further insight into the character of God—but not His physical description. God does not consist of any material, or physical, substance.

Summary To Question 45: Why Do Certain Passages Seem To Teach That God Has A Body? (Anthropomorphisms)

In many passages in Scripture, God is described as having body parts. The Bible describes such things as God's eyes, arms, hand, fingers, and feet. Does this mean God actually has these body parts? Does the God of the Bible have a body?

While many have made the mistake of assuming these are actual descriptions of what God looks like, they are not. Indeed, these images are not to be understood literally. God is not made of any substance, and He has no parts. God is spirit. The technical term for these descriptions is "anthropomorphism." This is the attributing of physical characteristics to God—a Being who has no physical characteristics.

Rather than being literal descriptions of God's Person, they are rather descriptive pictures that the Bible uses to help us better understand the varied character of God. From these descriptions of God which we find in Scripture we are in a better position to understand the nature and character of God.

Question 46

What Do We Say To People Who Interpret All Descriptions Of God In A Literal Manner?

The Bible attributes a number of human characteristics to God. Among other things, Scripture says that God has hands, feet, eyes, and hair. Many people understand these references in a literal manner.

However, if one wishes to take the various references to God in Scripture literally, then they will wind up with a very interesting looking being. Consider some other verses that describe God.

1. Does God Have Feathers And Wings?

The psalmist speaks of the feathers and wings of God:

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart (Psalm 91:4 NIV).

Are we to assume His form has feathers?

2. Does He Have A Sword For A Tongue?

In the Book of Revelation, John wrote about God's tongue is like a sword:

He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was as bright as the sun in all its brilliance (Revelation 1:16 NLT).

Does this mean God has a literal sword for a tongue?

3. Is He An Actual Door?

Jesus said that He was a door. In John's gospel we read:

Jesus said: "I am the door" (John 10:9 KJV).

Is Jesus a literal door made of wood and hinges?

4. Is God Fire?

The writer to the Hebrews stated that God is fire.

He put it this way:

For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29 KJV).

Is God made of fire?

They Are Not To Be Understood Literally

By taking these verses literally, God would look like a bird, have a sword for a tongue, would be made of wood, and would function as a furnace! Obviously, these descriptions are not intended to be understood literally. They are pictorial images that describe the character of God—they are not actual descriptions of what He looks like.

Since God's nature is unlike anything in creation, humans need something to think about when we consider the Person of God. Consequently, God has given us analogies of Himself with the human body. All of these analogies point to some aspect of His character. They help us better understand the nature, and actions, of the invisible God.

While we cannot see God, we are fortunate that He has given us many reference points to understand Him. While every description reflects a part of His character—no particular analogy describes His entire character.

Summary To Question 46: What Do We Say To People Who Interpret All Descriptions Of God In A Literal Manner?

There are some people who interpret all of the descriptions of God in a literal manner. In other words, they believe God actually has eyes, a nose, hair, and feet. This, they assume, is the most consistent way to understand the biblical references to God.

Yet this cannot be consistently done. The Bible also speaks of God having feathers. Understanding this literally would not make any sense.

In addition, Scripture says that God's tongue is like a sword. Again, this is not to be interpreted literally.

Jesus said He was the door. Yet nobody understands this to be a literal description of Him.

Finally, the Bible says that God is a consuming fire. Of course, God is not a literal fire.

Therefore, for those who say that any physical description of the Lord is to be understood in a literal manner, such as having eyes, nose, or feet, must deal with these other passages. They make it abundantly clear that these images are not to be understood literally.

Question 47

Why Is God Compared To Animals?

The Scripture compares God to humans and human-like traits. We also find a number of comparisons of God to animals. They include the following descriptions.

Lion

The lion had been called the “king of beasts.” We find that the Lord compares Himself to a lion. We read about this in the Book of Isaiah:

This is what the LORD says to me: “As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey—and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against him, he is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor—so the LORD Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights” (Isaiah 31:4 NIV).

The Lord, like the lion, will come down and do battle on the side of His people.

It is interesting to note that the devil is also referred to as acting like a lion in Scripture. Peter wrote of this:

Keep your mind clear, and be alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion as he looks for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8 God’s Word).

Therefore, a lion can have either a good or a bad connotation in Scripture. It all depends upon the context.

Lamb

One of the most prominent animals in the Bible is the lamb. The Lord Himself is compared to a lamb that is led to slaughter. Isaiah the prophet wrote this description of Him:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:7 NRSV).

This is a description of Jesus—the Lamb of God.

Eagle

God’s care is like that of an eagle. Moses wrote:

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The

LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him (Deuteronomy 32:11,12 NIV).

As an eagle spreads its wings over its young. In the same manner, God looks after His own.

Mother Hen

Jesus compared Himself to a mother hen. As Christ wept over the city of Jerusalem, the city which rejected Him as the promised Messiah, He gave the comparison to a hen gathering her chicks under her wings. We read:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone to death those sent to you! How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings! But you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37 God's Word).

Jesus wanted to safely gather the people of Jerusalem. However, they were not willing to be gathered. The Lord had given them every opportunity to believe but they did not take it. Hence judgment was coming to them.

A Moth

The psalmist compares God to a moth. He takes away certain “things” which are dear or valuable to them:

With stern warnings you discipline people for their crimes. Like a moth you eat away at what is dear to them. Certainly, everyone is like a whisper in the wind (Psalm 39:11 God's Word).

God does not allow people to succeed with their crimes. Instead He removes their “ill-gotten gains.”

The key word in these verses is “like.” God is *like* an animal in some of the things that He does. The Bible writers are referring to God's actions—not His character, or physical makeup.

God is neither a human being, nor is He an animal. Yet the Bible assigns Him traits that humans have, and compares His actions to that of animals. These descriptions help us have a better understanding of how God works. But they are not describing His physical form.

Summary To Question 47: Why Is God Compared To Animals?

Scripture compares God to a number of different things. Indeed, not only is there the comparison to certain characteristics which humans have, there is also the comparison with certain traits in animals. In fact, God's actions are compared to such things as a lion, lamb, an eagle, a mother hen, and a moth.

Like a lion, the Lord is strong. He rules over everything. The Lord is King over all things.

On the other hand, like a lamb, there is the gentleness in His character. He is tender and loving—especially to those who are His.

Like the soaring eagle the God of Scripture looks down on all things. Nothing escapes His notice.

Jesus compared Himself to a mother hen who looks after her young. With loving care, God watches out for those who are His own. He wants to gather them under “tender wings.”

God is also compared to a moth. He eats away at those things which are valuable to the wicked. Indeed, He makes it clear that everything material will one day perish.

These descriptions are given to describe the way God acts—not what He looks like. He does not look like an animal.

Yet, there are certain traits in animals which give us a greater appreciation for who God is and what He does. We can certainly understand these analogies.

Question 48

Why Is God Compared To Non-Living Things?

The God of Scripture is compared to many things. Indeed, in the Bible, we find Him compared to certain characteristics which human beings have, as well as being compared to animals. These descriptions of God with hands, feet, ears, feathers, and wings are certainly not to be understood literally. Rather, they are given to us as analogies of things we can identify with—so that we can have a better understanding of His character.

We also find that in a number of instances He is compared to non-living things. These descriptions also provide further insight into His character. We can cite the following examples.

1. The Sun And A Shield

The psalmist compares the Lord to the sun in the sky, and a shield. They give the idea of blessing and protection.

We read:

For the LORD God is a sun and shield. The LORD gives grace and glory; He does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity (Psalm 84:11 HCSB).

The Lord protects and blesses His own. Indeed, there is the promise that He will not withhold anything that is good for those who live with integrity.

This is a promise we can claim—if we fulfill the requirements. Indeed, we must live a life which is characterized with uprightness and honesty.

2. The Morning Star

Jesus is also compared to the Morning Star. We read about this in the Book of Revelation where He Himself makes this comparison:

It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star (Revelation 22:16 NRSV).

As the bright morning star He shines the light that directs our paths as to how we should live. It should be our desire that He light the way for us. Otherwise, we will walk in darkness. Jesus Himself said:

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12 NIV).

If we follow Him, we will live in the light rather than in darkness. Jesus is the light of the world!

3. Light

We have another comparison to light. In fact, John the Apostle compared God to light itself. He wrote:

This is the message he has given us to announce to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him at all (1 John 1:5 NLT).

There is no darkness in God's character. Consequently, when we follow Him, we will not walk in the darkness but rather in the light. This echoes what Jesus had said about Himself.

In the Gospel of John, the same writer made the comparison of light and darkness.

He wrote the following:

This, then, is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God (John 3:19-21 HCSB).

Notice that those who live by the truth come to the light, while those who practice wickedness want to remain in the darkness. We can live in the light or in the darkness—it is our choice.

4. A Strong Tower

The Lord is also compared to a strong tower. In other words, He is the place where we can run to for safety.

In Proverbs, it says:

The name of the Lord is a strong tower. A righteous person runs to it and is safe (Proverbs 18:10 God's Word).

As a tower is strong and mighty—so is the Lord. There is safety when we put ourselves in a position of trust in Him.

5. A Fountain

He is also compared to a fountain of life by which we see light.

The psalmist wrote:

For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light (Psalm 36:9 NKJV).

God is the fountain, or source of life. Furthermore, it is from the light of God which we see light. This means that we should view all things through His perspective.

6. A Fiery Cloud

After the Exodus from Egypt, God revealed Himself to the children of Israel through a fiery cloud. Although God led Israel by means of this cloud, He was never seen by the nation. Moses made this clear to the people. He said:

Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire (Deuteronomy 4:15 NKJV).

This is another indication that God has no physical form. The cloud was given as an analogy of who God is, as well as what He does for His people.

In sum, these comparisons help us better understand the character and actions of the God of Scripture. Indeed, we can take much comfort in what they teach us.

Summary To Question 48

Why Is God Compared To Non-Living Things?

In Scripture, we find that God is compared to a number of things both living and non-living. Many human characteristics are attributed to Him. He is also compared to the traits of certain animals.

In addition, we find the Lord compared to a number of non-living things. For example, the Lord is compared to the sun in the sky. As the sun provides the things necessary for us to experience physical life, the Lord provides those things which are necessary for spiritual life.

He is also our Protector. Therefore, we find Him compared to a shield which protects. Scripture emphasizes this aspect of God's character. He looks after those who are His.

Jesus compared Himself to the "morning star." He is the "bright light" for each of us. During His earthly ministry, Jesus said that those who follow Him will not walk in darkness.

This fits what the Bible records elsewhere. God Himself said that He is light. Again, there is the emphasis that He will light our way.

The Lord is also compared to a strong tower. This is another illustration of the protection He provides to His people. He is our strength—for we have none on our own.

In the psalms we find that the Lord is portrayed as a "fountain of life." All life flows from Him. This passage also says that we see light in His light.

This being the case, we should always attempt to get God's perspective on all matters. This will guarantee that we will be in "the light."

The Lord lit the way for the people of Israel who were leaving Egypt. He was a "fiery cloud" that led them on the proper path.

Each of these illustrates something of the character of God, as well as teaching us many valuable lessons. The Lord is our strength, our protection, who wants to lead us into the light. Therefore, we should allow Him to lead us in the "paths of righteousness."

Question 49

Why Is God Compared To Human Relationships And Occupations?

The Bible compares God to a number of things both living and non-living. They include human beings, animals as well as inanimate objects such as a tower, the sun, and a fountain.

There is still more. The God of Scripture is compared to a number of things that are human—such as human relationships as well as human occupations.

1. Father

The God of the Bible is likened to a Father. This description is rare in the Old Testament but is used quite often in the New Testament. In one instance, Moses asked the nation of Israel the following question:

Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? (Deuteronomy 32:6 NIV).

The Lord God is the Father, the Creator.

2. Husband

The God of the Bible is also likened to a husband. This comparison is found in the Old Testament. Isaiah the prophet wrote:

For your husband is your Maker His name is Yahweh of Hosts— and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth (Isaiah 54:5 HCSB).

The Lord was the husband to the nation of Israel. Unfortunately, they were a faithless wife on too many occasions.

3. Shepherd

The Lord is also like a shepherd. David made this comparison in the famous 23rd Psalm where he wrote these memorable words:

The LORD is my shepherd; I have everything I need (Psalm 23:1 NLT).

This is a familiar analogy. Believers are compared to sheep and the Lord is our Shepherd. As sheep cannot exist without a shepherd, we cannot function properly in the spiritual realm without the care of the Good Shepherd.

4. Doctor Or Healer

The Lord is also compared to a doctor, or a healer. We read in Exodus that it is the Lord who heals the diseases of the people:

He said, “If you will carefully obey the LORD your God, do what is right in His eyes, pay attention to His commands, and keep all His statutes, I will not inflict any illness on you I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you” (Exodus 15:26 HCSB).

He is the One who heals our diseases. Indeed, He is our Great Physician.

5. Architect And Builder

The God of the Bible is called an architect and builder. The writer to the Hebrews, in speaking of Abraham, wrote:

For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10 NRSV).

God is the One who builds a city with eternal foundations. Indeed, when He builds the house, the house remains stable.

The psalmist wrote:

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain (Psalm 127:1 NIV).

We certainly want the Lord to build the house seeing that He is the Great Builder and Architect.

6. Judge And King

The Lord is also compared to both a Judge and a King.

Isaiah declared that the Lord is all of these things to us:

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our ruler, the LORD is our king; he will save us (Isaiah 33:22 NRSV).

He will rule as both judge and king over the nations.

7. Warrior

The Lord is also compared to a warrior. In the Book of Exodus, we read this description of Him:

The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name (Exodus 15:3 NRSV).

The Lord fights for those who are His. When He fights, He always wins the battle.

These human relationships, to which the God of the Bible is compared, give us a further understanding of His character and His actions.

As with the other comparisons we find in Scripture, we can take much comfort in these illustrations.

**Summary To Question 49:
Why Is God Compared To Human
Relationships And Occupations?**

As we search the Word of God, we find that the Lord is compared to many different things. These comparisons are given to help us gain a better understanding of who He is, as well as what He does.

Among other things, we find the God of the Bible compared to human relationships. This includes such things as a father and a husband. He was a Father to His people Israel in the Old Testament, and today He is the Father to those who believe in Him through God the Son, Jesus Christ.

We also find the Lord compared to a husband to the nation of Israel. He was always the faithful husband, while the nation was often a faithless wife.

Scripture also illustrates the character and actions of the Lord by means of a number of human occupations. They include such illustrations as a shepherd, doctor, a judge, a king, and a warrior.

He is the Good Shepherd to believers—who are His sheep. As sheep desperately need the shepherd, we desperately need Him to watch over us. The Lord is also the Great Physician—He is the One who heals our diseases.

The God of Scripture is also compared to the occupation of a Judge. Contrary to human judges, the Lord never makes the wrong decision. As a King, the Lord rules over His Kingdom. His rule is based upon righteousness. This, of course, is in contrast to all earthly rulers.

Finally, we have the comparison to a warrior. The Lord fights the battles for His people. Again, in contrast to human warriors, the Lord always wins the battle.

All of these descriptions are given as helpful reference points for humans to better understand God. While each description reflects something of His character, God is not exactly like any specific thing in the created universe. This is something which we must appreciate.

Question 50

Doesn't The Bible Say People Actually Saw God?

There are several passages of Scripture that seem to indicate people actually saw God. What are we to make of these episodes? Did God actually become visible for them?

We can make the following observations about these passages.

1. **Jacob At Peniel**

The Bible says that the patriarch Jacob actually saw God face-to-face at a place called Peniel. The Bible says:

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Genesis 32:30 NKJV).

Here Jacob is said to have seen God "face to face."

2. **Moses At The Burning Bush And Other Occasions**

The Bible says that Moses saw God on a number of separate occasions. At the burning bush, the Bible says the following transpired:

Then he [God] said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:6 NIV).

On this occasion, Moses did not want to look at God face to face—so he hid his face from the Lord.

Scripture declares that Moses often spoke to the Lord face-to-face as one would speak to a friend. We read about this in Exodus:

Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent (Exodus 33:11 NRSV).

Moses was in a unique position with respect to seeing God.

At the end of the Book Deuteronomy, when summing up the life of Moses, we also read about Moses knowing God face-to-face. Scripture says:

No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10 HCSB).

In each of these three passages, it says that Moses actually saw God.

3. Isaiah

Isaiah the prophet records himself seeing God. He recorded what occurred as follows:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple (Isaiah 6:1 NIV).

Isaiah said that he saw the Lord in His Holy Temple.

They Did Not Actually See God: No One Is Able To See God

Did these people actually see God? No. What these people saw was not the essence of God, but rather a physical representation of Him. As spirit, God is invisible to humanity. No one can see Him directly.

The Apostle Paul, in explaining the character of Jesus, had this to say about God:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation (Colossians 1:15 NLT).

God is invisible. This means that He cannot be seen with the human eye. Though God, in His essence, is invisible, He has taken a physical form on occasions to communicate with His creation. He did this for the benefit of those to whom He was speaking. The physical form gave humanity a point of reference to which they could communicate with God.

But that which the people saw was not the essence of God, for no one has seen, or can see, God in His essence. John wrote:

No one has ever seen God. God's only Son, the one who is closest to the Father's heart, has made him known (John 1:18 God's Word).

Note that John says nobody has ever seen God. Nobody.

In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote that it is not possible for humans to be in God's holy presence. To Timothy, he said the following about the Lord:

It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen (1 Timothy 6:16 NRSV).

Nobody has seen God—neither is anyone able to see God. He dwells in light which is unapproachable. Consequently, sinful humanity does not have access to a holy God. We cannot see Him in His essence.

Therefore, these Old Testament passages that speak about seeing God do not refer to actually seeing Him in His essence. From the statements of the

New Testament writers, we find that they did not understand the experiences of Jacob, Moses, and Isaiah as actually seeing God.

How Will Believers See God In Heaven?

If we cannot see God, then how are we to understand certain promises of Scripture that speak of seeing God? Jesus said:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8 KJV).

Jesus promised that we would see God.

In the Book of Revelation, we also read about believers seeing the face of God in heaven. It says the following:

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:4 NRSV)

This is another promise that we will see His face.

The Apostle John agreed with this. He wrote that there would come a day when we believers will see Him exactly as He is:

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is (1 John 3:2 NRSV).

This is another indication that we will one day see God.

These passages promise a number of things. First, we are promised that we will see God. We are also promised that we will see Him exactly as He is. Scripture also says that that we will see Him “face to face.” How are we to understand these statements? Will we have abilities in our new bodies that allow us to actually see God’s essence?

The simple answer to this question is that these promises are not to be understood in a literal sense. For one thing, God does not have a face. Therefore, we will not be able to see Him “face to face” as we see other humans.

What is promised is that we will be able to be in God’s presence and see Him for what He is—the majestic and holy God. It is impossible for us now to be in His presence because of our sinful nature.

When our bodies have been transformed into bodies without sin and corruption, then we will then be able to be in His presence. The Bible promises that this transformation will happen. The Apostle Paul wrote:

But let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed. It will happen in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For

when the trumpet sounds, the Christians who have died will be raised with transformed bodies. And then we who are living will be transformed so that we will never die. For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die. When this happens—when our perishable earthly bodies have been transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die-- then at last the Scriptures will come true: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54 NLT).

While believers will then be able to be in the actual presence of God, the Bible does not explain what exactly we will literally see of God’s Person. This is one of the many exciting things that await those who have believed in Christ!

In sum, while the Bible says that certain people saw God, what they actually saw was a representation of His Person. God is invisible to humanity.

Summary To Question 50 Doesn’t The Bible Say That People Actually Saw God?

During the Old Testament period, there are a number of episodes recorded for us where it seems that God appeared to certain people in a physical form. This includes Moses, Jacob, and Isaiah.

For example, the patriarch Jacob was said to have seen the Lord. In fact, he named the place in a manner which reflected his seeing the Lord “face to face.”

The Lord also appeared to Moses in the burning bush, as well as upon a number of other occasions. Indeed, Scripture summarized the life of Moses by saying that he was in a unique position in that he was able to see the Lord “face to face.”

Isaiah the prophet also testified to “seeing the Lord.”

Did these people actually see God?

They did not. The form what each of them saw was not the essence of God but rather a physical representation of God for their benefit. Nobody has seen God, or can see God for.

Indeed, by nature, He is an invisible spirit. This means that we humans do not have the capability of seeing Him in our sinful bodies.

What about in the future when we have new bodies? Will we then be able to actually see God? We find that Jesus promised that those who believe in Him will one day be able to “see” God. Other passages speak of seeing God face-to-face.

However, these promises are not to be understood in a literal sense. We will see God, as He is, in the sense that we will be able to be in His presence.

This is impossible now because our sinful nature does not allow us to be in the presence of a Holy God.

While in the future we will be able to be in His presence with our glorified bodies, it seems that we will still be unable to see the true essence of God. Consequently, the Bible does not explain what sense we will be able to literally see the invisible God in the afterlife.

However, the fact that we will be able to be in His Holy presence should more than satisfy us!

Question 51

Can Humans Become God?

From time to time throughout our history, there have been those who claim that humans are God, or that humans can become God. The Mormon Church, for example, teaches that Mormon males have the power to attain godhood. Does the Bible teach that we can become God?

1. **Satan Promised Adam And Eve They Could Be Like God**

The false promise that human beings can become God goes as far back as the first humans, Adam, and Eve. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, the only negative commandment God gave them was not to eat of fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent appeared to them and disputed God. He said:

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5 NRSV).

They were promised some type of God-like status—if they ate the fruit. While the exact nature of the promise is debated, it is clear that the serpent promised these two that they were to be in some sense God-like

2. **This Is A False Promise**

When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, they did not become as God, or God-like, as the serpent promised. Instead they brought sin into the world, and were banished from God's presence. Satan, however, has been telling people that lie ever since—that humans can become God-like. Unfortunately, people still believe it.

3. **The Nature Of God Prohibits It: He Alone Is God**

The reason humankind cannot become God is because of the nature of God. God did not become God at some certain point. In fact, He has been, is, and always will be God. He is the eternal infinite God. There is nothing lacking in His character, and He needs nothing to exist. He is adequate in and by Himself. No other being in the universe is like this.

Moreover, He is the only God who now exists, or ever will exist. Isaiah the prophet made this clear when he recorded the following words of the Lord:

This is what the LORD, Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty, says: I am the First and the Last; there is no other God (Isaiah 44:6 NLT).

He is the first and the last. No other God exists.

Isaiah also recorded the Lord, Yahweh, saying the following about Himself:

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD. “I have chosen you as my servant so that you can know and believe in me and understand that I am the one {who did this}. No god was formed before me, and there will be none after me (Isaiah 43:10 God’s Word).

Again, there is the claim that no god was formed before Him, neither shall there be any god after Him. He alone is God.

The New Testament concurs. The God of the Bible is God by nature. The Apostle Paul wrote the following to the Galatians:

Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist (Galatians 4:8 NLT).

These other so-called gods have never existed. There never has been, there never will be, any other God or gods.

4. Humankind Is Finite: We Can Never Become God

Human beings, on the other hand, are finite, limited creatures. There was a time when humanity did not exist. When humankind came into being, it was because of the will of God. We human beings cannot exist on our own, we are not self-sustaining. We need food, air, and water, to stay alive. Without these and other things, we would perish. God is not like this. He needs nothing to exist.

Furthermore, Scripture compares God to a potter—and humans to the clay which is molded. Isaiah acknowledged this when he wrote:

But now, O LORD, You *are* our Father; we *are* the clay, and You our potter; and all we *are* the work of Your hand (Isaiah 64:8 NKJV).

He is the One who molds us—we do not mold Him.

5. God Grants Everlasting Life To Believers: We Cannot Grant This To Ourselves

The Bible also says that God will grant everlasting life to those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. John wrote:

The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God’s wrath remains on him (John 3:36 NET).

God grants us everlasting life. We cannot grant it to ourselves. But this will not mean humans will become God. Each individual must always depend upon God for everlasting life.

Consequently, those who promise that humans can become God either do not understand the differences between the creature and the Creator, or are deliberately perverting the truth of God.

Conclusion: It Is Not Possible For Humans To Become God

It is clear that there is a great gulf between the Creator and the created—between God and humanity. It is not possible for humans to become God. God is God, while we are part of His creation. Though we are called His children, we still have a different nature, and we will always have a different nature.

**Summary To Question 51:
Can Humans Become God?**

Many humans do indeed hope that one day they will actually become God. However, this is something which is impossible to happen.

This false promise that humans can become God-like is not new. Indeed, it was given to Adam and Eve way back in the Garden of Eden by the lying serpent. This lie has been retold ever since.

The reason that humans cannot become God has to do with the nature of God. God is God by nature. He did not become God at some certain point in time. He has always been God, and always will be God.

Human beings, on the other hand, are finite, or limited, creatures. There was a time when human beings did not exist but there has never been a time when God has not existed. This is the difference between the creature and the Creator.

While human beings who have believed in Jesus will be given everlasting life, this still does not mean that we will become God. Our eternal life will always be dependent upon Him.

Therefore, the answer to the question is clear. Human beings will never become God-like.

Question 52

Can God Become A Human Being?

Though it is not possible for humans to become God, what about the possibility of God becoming a human being? Can God become human? The answer is, “Yes.”

Not only can the invisible God become a human being, He did exactly this in the Person of Jesus Christ. We can summarize what happened as follows.

The Cry Of Job: God Become A Human!

Over three thousand years ago, there lived a man named Job who was experiencing a great deal of suffering. Job did not think that God understood his pain. Job cried out for a mediator between God and humanity.

He said:

God is not a mortal like me, so I cannot argue with him or take him to trial. If only there were a mediator who could bring us together, but there is none (Job 9:32,33 NLT).

Job wanted God to become a human—someone who could understand both God and humanity.

Job's Wish Was Fulfilled In Jesus Christ

Job's desire was for God to become a human being. He assumed that God would then personally experience the suffering, and limitation which humankind endures. Then He would understand what we are enduring.

This desire expressed by Job was fulfilled. The New Testament records that some two thousand years ago the eternal God became a human being in the Person of Jesus Christ.

It is important to understand that when Jesus became a human, He did not quit being God, and God did not change into a human. The Gospel according to John testifies:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:1,14 KJV).

The New Living Translation reads:

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father (John 1:14 NLT).

Jesus Christ, the eternal God, became a human being at a certain time in history. He had been God for all eternity, but He added something to His Person that He had never had before—a human nature.

He Became Human On Our Behalf

Jesus did indeed suffer the limitation and humiliation of becoming a human being on our behalf. Paul wrote of this to the Philippians:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form (Philippians 2:5-7 NRSV).

When Jesus became a human, He took upon Himself the form of a slave or servant. In other words, there was self-limitation which He exercised.

Jesus' coming to earth was for the purpose of revealing God to humanity—and to be that mediator that Job desired.

The Apostle Paul records how Jesus is that go-between between us and God. He wrote the following to Timothy:

For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human (1 Timothy 2:5 NET).

It was for us that Jesus Christ became human.

He Became A Human To Save Humanity From Their Sins

God did indeed answer Job's cry. For a short period of time, God the Son limited Himself to a body in order to save all of humankind. Because God the Son became like one of us, He is able to personally identify with the suffering and pain that we ourselves experience.

The writer to the Hebrews stated it in this manner:

For since He Himself was tested and has suffered, He is able to help those who are tested (Hebrews 2:18 HCSB).

The Bible teaches that the living God made the supreme sacrifice on our behalf. The Creator became like one of His creation for the purpose of making right the relationship that humankind had broken. This is the "good news"—the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Summary To Question 52 Can God Become A Human Being?

Human beings cannot become God. The Bible makes this clear. However, it is possible that God can become a human being.

This was the desire of the patriarch Job. He wanted God to become a human so that He could understand the sort of things which we have to endure in this life. It seems that Job wanted a go-between—someone who was fully God, as well as fully human.

Job's cry was answered. The New Testament informs us that some two thousand years ago God the Son left heaven's glory to come to earth. He did this to live as one of us, as well as to die for the sins of the world.

This cleared the way for humans to be saved from their sins. He made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of humanity in order to restore the broken relationship between the Creator and the created.

In addition, we are told that Jesus personally understands what we are experiencing because He has experienced these things Himself. Therefore, when we talk to Him about our problems He understands— because He has also suffered the limitations as well as the humiliation of becoming a human being. He has done all of this for us.

Question 53

Did God Ever Take A Physical Form Before The Coming Of Christ? (Theophanies)

The Bible says that some two thousand years ago God the Son became a human in the Person of Jesus Christ. John the evangelist described it this way:

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son (John 1:14 NLT).

This is the only time God became human and lived with humanity. Previously, it seems that God had assumed a temporary physical form on a number of occasions.

The Old Testament Records A Number Of Temporary Appearances Of God In A Human Form

God, by nature, is an invisible Spirit. No human being has seen Him, or is able to see Him. However, at certain times, God seemingly took on visible forms to appear to people. These appearances are known as “theophanies.”

There are eight recorded appearances in the Old Testament where it is possible that God took upon Himself a physical form for a short duration. Three times He appeared as a man, and five times as the “angel of the Lord.” Each time that this occurred it was in an extraordinary situation. They are as follows.

1. He Appeared To Hagar (Genesis 16:9-13)

Hagar was Abraham's mistress—the mother of his son Ishmael. Hagar and Ishmael were banished from Abraham and his wife Sarah into the desert. As they were dying of thirst, the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar to provide water for the survival of her and her young child.

Seemingly, the angel of the Lord that appeared to Hagar was God Himself. The Bible says:

She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me” (Genesis 16:13 NIV).

It was the Lord Himself who spoke to Hagar. God had a plan for Ishmael and his descendants.

Therefore, it is likely that He personally appeared to spare Ishmael from death.

2. God Appeared To Abraham And Sarah At Mamre (Genesis 18:1-33)

Three men appeared to Abraham and his wife Sarah at the plains of Mamre. They had come to inform them concerning two matters. The son that God had promised to the couple would be born to Abraham and Sarah the next year, and the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed.

One of the three visitors who gave them this information is designated as the Lord. The Bible says:

The Lord appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre (Genesis 18:1 NLT).

The Bible says that the Lord appeared to Abraham.

In this same passage, this person is called the “Judge of all the earth:”

Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just? (Genesis 18:25 NRSV).

This is a title that belongs to God alone. This seems to make it plain that, on this occasion, God Himself was among the visitors to Abraham.

3. God Again Appeared To Abraham On Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:11-14)

God told Abraham to bring his son Isaac to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed. Abraham obeyed. He was about to take Isaac’s life when God intervened. The Bible says that the Angel of the Lord stopped Abraham. The Bible records what then happened:

Then He said, “Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from Me” (Genesis 22:12 HCSB).

The angel, or messenger, from the Lord told Abraham that it was from Him, that is the Lord, that Abraham did not withhold his son. This seems to indicate that the angel of the Lord was the Lord Himself.

This angel called a second time to Abraham. His words reflected things which only God Himself could say. We read:

Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son, I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the gates of their enemies. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed

by your offspring because you have obeyed My command” (Genesis 22:15 HCSB).

In this instance the angel of the Lord, who called out to Abraham on Mount Moriah, was seemingly the Lord Himself.

4. The Lord Appeared To Jacob At Peniel (Genesis 32:24-43)

This account has the patriarch Jacob wrestling all night with a man who finally disabled him. The next morning Jacob realized that it was God Himself whom he had wrestled. The Bible says:

Jacob then named the place Peniel, “For,” [he said,] “I have seen God face to face, and I have been delivered” (Genesis 32:30 HCSB).

Jacob lost the wrestling match with the Lord, but he did live to tell about it.

5. He Appeared To Moses In The Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2-6)

When Moses received his call from the Lord to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, he saw a bush that was burning, but was not being consumed by the fire. The Bible describes it in this manner:

Suddenly, the angel of the LORD appeared to him as a blazing fire in a bush. Moses was amazed because the bush was engulfed in flames, but it didn’t burn up. “Amazing!” Moses said to himself. “Why isn’t that bush burning up? I must go over to see this.” When the LORD saw that he had caught Moses’ attention, God called to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!” “Here I am!” Moses replied. “Do not come any closer,” God told him. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” When Moses heard this, he hid his face in his hands because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:2-6 NLT).

Because of the magnitude of the task Moses was about to undertake, God personally appeared to him by means of the burning bush in the form of the angel of the Lord.

6. God Appeared To Gideon (Judges 6:11-24)

Gideon was the individual who was called by God to raise an army to defeat the innumerable Midianites. Because this man Gideon was a timid person, God paid him a visit to assure him that all would go well. After the encounter, Gideon realized who had visited him. The Bible records what happened as follows:

Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the LORD; and Gideon said, “Help me, Lord GOD! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face” (Judges 6:22 NRSV).

It appears that Gideon, the judge, had the honor of a direct appearance of God.

7. He Appeared To Samson's Parents (Judges 13:2-23)

The angel of the Lord appeared to a Hebrew couple to announce the birth of a son. He would grow up and deliver the people of Israel. Because of the importance of the mission, God personally appeared to them. Scripture records the following:

The Angel of the LORD did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the Angel of the LORD. "We're going to die," he said to his wife, "because we have seen God!" (Judges 13:21,22 HCSB).

They realized that the Lord Himself had visited them in a special way.

8. The Lord Was In The Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3:23-29)

The last recorded Old Testament appearance of God taking on a physical form was to the three young Hebrews in the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar threw these three young men into the furnace because they refused to worship his golden image. Scripture says that God miraculously spared their lives. Nebuchadnezzar was astonished:

"Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire. They aren't even hurt by the flames! And the fourth looks like a divine being!" (Daniel 3:25 NLT).

The "divine being" which Nebuchadnezzar saw was most likely, God Himself. However, it could have been merely an angelic messenger. The Scripture does not clearly say.

This marks the last of the eight instances where the Lord seemingly assumed some type of visible form.

Conclusion: On Certain Occasions, It Seems That God Temporarily Assumed A Human Body

Thus, we see from Scripture that, for special reasons and on certain occasions, God seemingly took upon a human body. These appearances were only temporary. However, they did set the stage for a more permanent visit—the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth.

There Is Another Way Of Understanding These Passages

While the idea that the angel of the Lord is a theophany, a temporary appearance of God in a human form for the benefit of the people, there are those who believe that each appearance can better be explained by assuming that it was merely a mighty angel who appeared.

The Understanding Of The Role Of A Messenger In The Ancient World

It is acknowledged that the angel speaks in the first person for God and that characteristics which belong to God alone are also applied to him. In other words, it appears as though this is God Himself speaking. However, this should not settle the issue—seeing that we must understand the nature of the role of a messenger in the ancient world.

The ancients viewed a messenger as one who had the authority to speak for the one who sent him. Therefore, the messenger could speak in the first person as though the one who sent him was actually speaking.

Consequently, while the messenger could personally make certain statements and claims, it was understood by everyone that the claims he was making were not his, but rather the one who sent him.

If this is the case, then it would explain why the angel of the Lord makes these specific claims for himself. He is speaking with the authority of the One who sent Him, the Lord.

In sum, the angel of the Lord could have been the Lord Himself or possibly an angel who spoke for the Lord using the first person “I.” Either view is possible.

Summary To Question 53 Did God Every Take A Physical Form The Coming Of Christ? (Theophanies)

Scripture records that on eight different occasions during the Old Testament period, God seemingly took on a physical form. Some of these appearances were as the “Angel of the Lord.” They include the following.

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, the mistress of Abraham after she and her young son were sent away from Abraham and Sarah. Hagar called the place “You are the God who sees me” because God appeared to her.

The Lord also appeared to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre. Three angels showed up at the tent of Abraham. One of them was called “the Lord.”

There was also an appearance to Abraham at Mount Moriah when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac. The Angel of the Lord in this instance seems to be the Lord Himself.

Scripture also records an appearance to Jacob at Peniel. Jacob said that he saw the Lord there “face to face.”

The Lord made a special appearance to Moses in a burning bush. Moses realized that he was on holy ground during this visit. Indeed, the Lord identified Himself from the burning bush.

The Lord appeared in a human-like form to the judge Gideon. Gideon recognized whom it was who appeared to him.

We also find him appearing to the parents of the judge Samson. They too understood that God made a direct appearance to them.

Finally, the Lord appeared with the three young Hebrews in the fiery furnace. King Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the fourth person was a divine being.

These eight brief appearances of God in a physical form teach us several things: When an extraordinary situation occurs, God is willing to personally appear. These occurrences set a precedent. Since God appeared on these occasions for a short duration during the Old Testament period, it set the stage for Him to come in the Person of Jesus Christ to live upon the earth.

However, as we noted, it is also possible that it was not actually the Lord Himself who appeared but an “angel” who represented Him. Whatever the case may be, the Lord decided to uniquely appear on these eight special occasions.

Question 54

What About Certain Passages That Attribute Human Passions To God? (Anthropopathisms)

Human emotions are not part of God's character. However, the Bible does refer to God's emotions in human terms. When this occurs, the technical term is "anthropopathism" (human passions). From Scripture we find the following examples of human emotions attributed to God.

1. God Experiences Laughter

The Bible speaks of God laughing. The psalmist wrote:

The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them (Psalm 2:4 HCSB).

This type of laughter is one of derision. He derides the nations for attempting to rebel against Him. Indeed, any rebellion against the Lord is futile.

2. God Shows Weariness

The Bible says that God gets weary. The Lord said:

Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them (Isaiah 1:14 NIV).

The practices of Israel had caused the Lord to grow weary. Of course, God does not get weary or tired in the human sense of the term.

The Holman Christian Standard Version reads:

I hate your New Moons and prescribed festivals. They have become a burden to Me; I am tired of putting up with [them] (Isaiah 1:14 HCSB).

This is more the idea. God's patience was wearing thin with this people who said one thing, but did something else. Again, these are human terms which are used to explain God's dealings.

3. God Becomes Jealous

Scripture speaks of God's jealousy. We read in Ezekiel about the Lord's jealousy. He said:

I will turn my jealous anger against you, and they will deal furiously with you. They will cut off your nose and ears, and any survivors will then be slaughtered by the sword. Your children will be taken away as captives, and everything that is left will be burned (Ezekiel 23:25 NLT).

Jealously was attributed to the Lord. However, God's jealousy is not like human jealousy. It is more of a passionate concern.

4. God Shows Hatred

The Bible says that God shows hatred. Moses wrote:

And never set up sacred pillars for worship, for the LORD your God hates them (Deuteronomy 16:22 NLT).

This is a holy hatred. Indeed, God hates sin of any kind.

5. God Experiences Joy

The emotion of joy is attributed to God. Isaiah wrote the following:

As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you (Isaiah 62:5 NIV).

The Lord rejoices over His people.

6. God Shows Grief

The Bible says that God was grieved over the behavior of wayward Israel in the desert. The psalmist observed:

How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! (Psalm 78:40 NIV).

He grieved over their unbelief and rebellion.

Paul wrote about the possibility of believers grieving the Holy Spirit:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30 NRSV).

Believers can behave in such a way as to grieve the Lord.

7. God Gives And Receives Love

In one of the most famous verses in the Bible, we are told that God can give love to others:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16 ESV).

The love of God is something which is clearly taught in Scripture.

His love is everlasting to those who trust Him. The psalmist wrote:

But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children's children (Psalm 103:17 NLT).

He is able to give and receive love.

8. God Has Compassion For His People

The Bible says that the Lord has compassion for His people. The psalmist wrote:

The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him (Psalm 103:13 NLT).

The Lord is a compassionate God.

9. God Wipes Away Tears

God is spoken of as wiping away tears from the eyes of people. Isaiah wrote:

He will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face and remove His people's disgrace from the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken (Isaiah 25:8 HCSB).

The tears of God's people will be wiped away from their faces.

10. God Remembers

The Bible speaks of God remembering. After the flood, the Bible said that God "remembered" Noah:

God remembered Noah, as well as all the wildlife and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water began to subside (Genesis 8:1 HCSB).

God is said to have remembered Noah in a special way.

11. God Knows

The Bible also speaks of God knowing things. We read the following in Genesis:

I am going down to see whether or not these reports are true. Then I will know (Genesis 18:21 NLT).

God knows what is true, and what is not true.

These Are For The Benefit Of Humanity

These human emotions, that are attributed to God, are done so for the benefit of humanity. We can better understand the nature of God when He is described with human-like passions.

However, they are only given as an analogy—so that we can better understand how God acts and thinks. He does not experience these emotions in the same way in which we do. The Lord uses these terms to teach us what He is like.

Nevertheless, it does demonstrate that human beings have certain characteristics that are like God—although they are not exactly the same.

Summary To Question 54
What About Certain Passages That Attribute Human Passions To God? (Anthropopathisms)

The Bible attributes human passions, or feelings to God. These are known as “anthropopathisms.” In the Bible we read of such things as God’s laughter, weariness, and jealousy. We are also told that He has compassion, He remembers, He loves, He knows, and He shows grief. Other human passions are also attributed to Him.

Yet these passions which are used to describe God do not directly correspond to the same passions which we experience. We love, but not in the same way as the Lord loves. We remember, but not in the same way in which God remembers.

Consequently, these descriptions of God are given to us to better explain the character of God in terms that we can understand. While these passions are compared to human passions, they are not the same. God is perfect in His character—we are not. Therefore, we must be careful not to assume that God acts and feels exactly the same way in which we do. He does not.

Appendix

What Is The Proper Way To Spell And Pronounce The Name Of The LORD? (Jehovah Or Yahweh)

There is much confusion when it comes to the proper spelling and pronunciation of the personal name of the LORD—the God of the Bible.

Some Bibles, such as the *King James Version*, use the word “Jehovah” while others have “Yahweh.” Many English translations use neither. Instead they employ the word LORD or LORD (small caps) when referring to the personal name of the God of Scripture.

Furthermore, some of the more ancient English translations spell the divine name differently. In William Tyndale’s translation (1525 edition), it was written as “Iehouah.” The *King James Version* also originally used Iehouah. It was not until the 1769 edition that it was changed to “Jehovah.”

Why the difference? Why have English translations used three different letters (I, J, and Y) to spell the personal name of God?

While the answer can get a bit complicated, we can simplify it as follows.

The Tetragrammaton

The personal name of the Lord in Hebrew is made up of four consonants (YHWH). This is known as the Tetragrammaton (the four letters). Initially, Hebrew did not have any vowels. They came later in the development of the language.

Since there were no vowel points, the pronunciation was handed down from generation to generation. In fact, it was not until the ninth century A.D. that vowel points were introduced into the Hebrew language by a group of scholars known as the Masoretes.

As far as the divine name YHWH was concerned, rather than putting the correct vowel points, the Masoretes decided to put the vowel points for the Hebrew word Adonai (meaning Lord or Master). They did this to remind the reader to use the Hebrew word for Lord (or Master) instead of the actual name of God (YHWH) when reading the Hebrew text.

This is why we find those reading the Hebrew text out loud will say Adonai instead of pronouncing the divine name YHWH when they come across it in the text.

These same, though incorrect, vowel points were then used in the English transliteration of the word—Jehovah or Iehouah—three vowels. Today, most scholars believe that the original pronunciation had only two vowels. Furthermore, they would have been a short “a” and an “e” sound. Therefore, Yahweh would likely be the correct pronunciation.

How The Letters J and I Came To Be Part Of The Spelling

If the Hebrew word for God's personal name started with a "Y," then why was it spelled with either an "I" or a "J?" The simple answer is that each of these letters were originally pronounced with a "Y" sound.

The Encyclopedia Americana explains the evolution of the letters J and I:

The form of J was unknown in any alphabet until the 14th century. Either symbol (J, I) used initially generally had the consonantal sound of Y as in year. Gradually, the two symbols (J, I) were differentiated, the J usually acquiring consonantal force and thus becoming regarded as a consonant, and the I becoming a vowel. It was not until 1630 that the differentiation became general in England (*Encyclopedia Americana*)

To sum up, there has never been a "J" sound in the Hebrew alphabet. Furthermore, this distinctive sound did not become part of the English language until the 17th century. In German, as is well known, the J is still pronounced like a Y. In addition, the letter I was also pronounced with a Y sound for a time.

Therefore, the English readers of the Tyndale translation, as well as the original King James Version, would have pronounced the divine name with a Y sound—not a J or an I sound as the letters are sounded out today.

Hence, the mixing the vowels for Hebrew word Lord or Master (Adonai) with the consonants for YHWH led to the creation of the word Jehovah. Hence, it was the effort to avoid pronouncing God's personal name that led to the making of a word that never before existed—Jehovah.

The introduction to the New English Translation, the NET Bible, aptly sums up the issue:

The translation of the Divine Name represents special problems for all English Bibles. The most difficult issue is the handling of the so-called tetragrammaton, the four consonants which represent the name of God in the Old Testament. This was rendered traditionally as "Jehovah" in the King James Version, but it is generally recognized that this represents a combination of the consonants of the tetragrammaton . . . (YHWH), and the vowels from a completely different Hebrew word . . . ('adonai, "master"), which were substituted by the Masoretes so that pronunciation of the Divine Name could be avoided: Whenever (YHWH), appeared in the text, the presence of the vowels from the word ('adonai) signaled to the reader that the word ('adonai) was to be pronounced instead.

Today most Old Testament scholars agree that the vocalization of the Divine Name would originally have been something like Yahweh, and this has become the generally accepted rendering (NET Bible Introduction).

Therefore, it seems likely that the original Hebrew pronunciation of the divine name was Yahweh.

About The Author

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