



The Names and Attributes of God

One of Webster's definitions of **attributes** is "qualities or characteristics of a person or thing." Therefore, as we describe God's attributes, are we to describe His attributes as contributing to a person or thing? If someone imagined their god...or addressed their god as a "wooden or metal statue" or a creature with supernatural powers, they might be attributing one's attributes to a "thing." However, our God is not imagined as a creature, but known as a person.

"Who is God?" To answer this question, it is logical to ask, "Who does God say He is?" For the answers, we must look to the Word of God. The Bible contains many names of God which give us an idea of His nature and character. God is the same in both the Old and New Testaments. *The Hebrew and Greek names of God in the Old and New Testaments are intimately related to His nature and character. His names, nature and character are forever unchanging.*¹ Of course, this needs a bit of explanation to the modern mind. To the modern mind the majority of people these days assume God to be easy-going, benevolent, loving, and somewhat vague. Therefore it is sometimes difficult for people to view the God of the Old Testament (Jehovah, the God of righteousness and moral perfection), as the same God of the New Testament....seen in Jesus Christ, as the God of love, who would have so much capacity to love to literally give us a redeemer (God in flesh) who "came to us" physically to earth to live as a man and die for us so that our sins may be forgiven. But yet we see from the Hebrew and Greek names of both the Old and New Testaments that He is the same God.....the same yesterday, today, and forever. We will see and observe this further as we look at the names and attributes of God.

Before we review the attributes of God, however, it is important to understand that the names of God are important in seeing the wonderful and exciting attributes of God. For His names contribute to His attributes...and His attributes go hand-in-hand with His names. They are practically synonymous in that they point to the great "I AM" who desires to love and cherish His

¹ Jay Rodgers, Fore Runner Message-Names and Attributes of God, website: http://forerunner.com/orthodoxy/x0002_1_namesattributes.html, page 1

children. For instance, the “immanent” attribute of God is like the name “Immanuel” (God with us). God is here, at all times, with us in the good and the bad times. The attributes of God are seen in His names.

There are several names of God in the Old Testament (Hebrew). These names are as follows:

- **‘Adonai’**—“Lord” God...*King, the Ruler, and the one possesses all creation. The name indicates that God is the controller and superintendent of His people. When we recognize and acknowledge that God is Lord, we give up our rights. We are no longer our own. We are to do His will and obey His commandments.*²
- **‘El or ‘Elohim**—“God” or “Gods.” ‘El is used as a prefix to many other names of God. ‘Elohim is the plural name which indicates or points to the Trinity. This is used when God swears an oath, makes a covenant, or calls thing into being. It indicates the immutability and agreement of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- **‘El-Olam**—“Everlasting” God. This name is seldom used. However, it recognizes that God exists for all eternity. He is the God of all ages (the Ancient of Days). ‘Olam’ is sometimes translated as ‘forever.’ Since God is forever, it would indicate that He is all-patient and all-wise.
- **‘El-Shaddai**—meaning “Almighty” God; stressing divine greatness and also indicating power over nature for the good of man (providence). The Almighty can make the powers of nature serve His purpose. “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). This should be a source of comfort and blessing for God’s people. It is a Hebrew name often used to indicate that God is a loving, protecting Father who enters into relationship and friendship with His children (His people).
- **‘Elyon**—meaning “Most High” God pointing to God’s exalted nature. ‘Elyon means that God is to be revered, worshipped and feared. He is the strong and mighty God in which the Word of God portrays over and over again.
- **Immanu’el or Emmanuel**—“God with us.” This word is used twice in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament (Isaiah 7:14; 8:10 and Matthew 1:23). It is used to prophesy the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and the incarnation of God as a man, or literally, God with us.
- **Jehovah Sabaoth**—“God of Hosts.” This is the common form of the name of God in the prophetic books of the Bible. This form calls up a vision of the King of Glory surrounded by a host of angels. It speaks of a

² Louis Berkhof, Summary of Christian Doctrine, Names and Attributes of God, Chapters 5 and 6, Ferdman’s Publishing Company, website: <http://www.peacemaker.net/unity/ibsocd.htm#5>,

victorious God, the Supreme King of heavenly hosts....the One who has triumphed over all enemies.

- **Yahweh or Jehovah**—“I AM” God. This is considered as the greatest name of God. This name is held most in reverence by God’s chosen people, Israel. This name indicates that Our God is the One and Only True God. God declared to Moses to be “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14) in that Moses wanted to tell the Egyptians what name the Hebrew God is called. All the pagan nations of the world that worshipped all the false gods would know that “Jehovah” is the Only True God that exists.

There are some New Testament Names of God (Greek) that correspond to the Hebrew names of God in the Old Testament. These names are:

- **Kurios**—“Lord”...the name applied to God....specifically to Jesus Christ. Kurios corresponds to Adonai and Jehovah. God is the possessor and ruler of all things...especially the people who acknowledge Him and are considered His people.
- **Pater**—“Father.” This name is used in the Old Testament to indicate that God is the Father of His people. It points specifically to the first person of the Trinity in the New Testament...as the Father of Jesus Christ. Also, it is used to indicate that God is the Father of individual believers who have been adopted into the family of God. True and redeemed children of God have the legal rights of sons and daughters to rightfully call God “our Father.” The Greek word “Pater” is sometimes used to designate God the creator of all things.
- **Theos**—“God.” Although this is the common Greek word for any pagan god, in the New Testament, this form takes the place of ‘El-Yisrael, the “God of Israel” in the Old Testament. It is most often used with a possessive pronoun, such as ‘my God,’... ‘Your God,’ or ‘our God.’
- **Father, Son and Holy Spirit**—The Trinity (no specific word used as Trinity) but is emphasized and understood as truth throughout the New Testament. Using the Three-in-One concept (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) indicated a “unity” of the Godhead. The one true God of Israel, ‘Elohim, is the same as God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit.

“Can we define God as to His attributes? He is an infinite source of power, He is omnipotent....remembering that God can always take you deeper into the knowledge of truth. He has personality with intellect, senses, etc. He is

immutable...for the Trinity cannot be separated. He is omniscient in that He knows all things...it is who He is. God planned it all.”³

“The attributes of God present a theme so vast and complex and so beyond the range of finite faculties that any attempt to classify them must be only approximate as to accuracy or completeness. So, also, the attributes are so interrelated and interdependent that the exact placing of some them is difficult if not wholly impossible.”⁴

With this statement by Lewis Chafer in mind, let us look at only some of the aspects of attributes of God that can be seen in Scripture. According to the Word of God, God is Omniscient, Infinite, Personal, Triune, Immanent, Sovereign, and Holy.

- **God is Omniscient**—*the omniscience of God comprehends all things...things past, things present, and things future, and the possible as well as the actual.*⁵ He is all-knowing. God sees the beginning and the end of history...and fathoms all eternity. God is the ultimate source of all knowledge and truth. All truth is God’s truth no matter where it is found. He knew us as individuals, before time began, when we were being formed in our mother’s womb....even all the circumstances of our lives.
- **God is Infinite**—God is everywhere. Our God, Our Holy and Righteous and Omnipotent God cannot be measured or understood by finite man. He called reality into existence. God is the first cause of all things; the only self-existent being.
- **God is personal**—God is a He...not an it. He is not simply a force, energy or substance...but a person. God has a personality. God is self-conscious and self-willed. God thinks and He acts. And, boy...does He act! Scripture provides a synopsis of the whole act of God when the words were penned... “In the beginning God”
- **God is Triune**—God is three persons in one, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three “persons” or personalities who are neither three gods, nor three modes, parts or aspects of God, but coequally and coeternally one God.
- **God is Immanent**—He is also with us because He is everywhere. God is present in our material world and reflected in the image of man. We can sense His presence all around us. God is above all things, and at the same time He is in all things sustaining the whole universe.

³ Dave Olander, Professor, Systematic Theology I, Tyndale Theological Seminary and Biblical Studies, class notes on the Attributes of God, 3rd session.,

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 & 2, Grand Rapids, Kregel Publishing 1976, page 189.

⁵ Ibid, page 192.

- **God is Sovereign**—He is all powerful showing an aspect of God’s infinite nature. God rules over the whole universe and He is able to give attention to all details of history. All specific events in the entire universe are under His control. All creation and history are under His authority.
- **God is Love**—He is benevolent and good. God’s ultimate purpose towards man and all creation is to favor us and draw us into a loving relationship with Him. He has made the ultimate sacrifice to make this relationship possible. All God’s actions towards His people are motivated by this attribute....love.
- **God is Holy**—There is nothing evil in God. Holiness is the greatest and all-encompassing attribute of His character. He is the holy God, holy grace, holy sovereign...He is holy in everything He is and does. He is Holy righteous...right all the time and right in all His wisdom.

There are other characteristics or attributes of God. The Bible gives many names and attributes of God; but, since God is infinite, we will never have complete knowledge of Him in this life

Chapter II of the Westminster Confession gives some succinct statements that adequately cover the names and attributes of God. I quote only one paragraph,

“There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure, spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his won glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty.....”⁶

We are indeed the guilty; yet the price of sin was paid on the cross of Calvary. The attributes of God paves the way for the perfection of the saints. Praise God...we who know Christ are washed in the blood of the Lamb!

⁶ The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter II of God, and of the Holy Trinity, website: http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/

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4. Rodgers, Jay, Fore Runner Message-*Names and Attributes of God*, website: http://forerunner.com/orthodoxy/x0002_1_namesattributes.html
5. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter II of God, and of the Holy Trinity, website: http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/

Note: Much of the material is taken from:

1. Lewis Sperry Chafer's Systematic Theology, Volumes 1 and 2. Not quoted verbatim.
2. Jay Rodgers' Forerunner website, Names and Attributes of God. The statements were not quoted verbatim.