

Understanding the Nature and Character of God

In 2 Kings 6:15-17, Elisha's servant awoke one morning to view what to him was a horrible sight. They were surrounded by the invading army from Syria. Horses, chariots and men were every where. He rushed in to tell Elisha the bad news and was met by this unusual response:

Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

The servant looked around and saw nobody else on their side. He began to wonder if Elisha was in his right mind! But then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes that he may see." What was his problem? That he saw too much? No! It was that he saw too little, for once his eyes were opened, he saw the armies of heaven surrounded and protecting the prophet.

I am convinced that every problem we face ultimately comes back to a mis-understanding of the nature and character of God. If we really knew God, for who He really is, in all of His majesty and glory, our lives would be significantly different.

I. What is God Really Like?

Find Isaiah 40 in your Bible. It is one of the great chapters in all the Scripture. It is really the hinge chapter for the entire book of Isaiah. The first 39 chapters described the dark judgment of God. But now the prophet tells of the promises of restoration, the coming of the Messiah and the future blessings in store for the nation of Israel. And it all begins in chapter 40 with a description of the greatness of our God.

In verses 9-31, the prophet Isaiah is painting an accurate picture of the nature and character of God to the nation of Israel. Like us, they had quickly forgotten what God was really like. He says in verse 9, "*Here is your God!*"

Read verses 10-11. How is God described in each verse?

How can God can be both a mighty ruler and a tender shepherd at the same time?

In verses 12-17, Isaiah asks a series of questions beginning with “who” or “with whom.” What insights do you learn about God's character from these verses?

Now read verses 18-26. Israel was tempted to forsake the living and true God for the false gods and idols of the neighboring nations. Isaiah asks, “*To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?*” He concludes in verse 25 with God Himself asking the same question: “*To whom then will you like Me, that I should be his equal.*”

How is the true God different from the false gods and idols of the heathen nations?

Finish reading the chapter, verses 27-31. The prophet records the whining of Israel in verse 27 when they said, “God doesn't know about us” and “God doesn't care about us.” But He did!

According to these verses, how does God relate personally to you?

II. The Attributes of God

We primarily know God through His attributes. An attribute of God is a description of one of the facets of God's character. It is something that is true about the very nature and character of God. Read the following list of the attributes of God and their references in Scripture. In the space provided, make a note as to how these relate to you.

a. Omnipotent, Sovereign (all powerful)

Jeremiah 32:27 *I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me? (NIV)*

Matthew 19:26 *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (NIV)*

b. Omnipresent (ever present)

Psalm 16:11 *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (NIV)*

Proverbs 15:3 *The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. (NIV)*

Revelation 19:6 *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. (NIV)*

c. Omniscient (all knowing)

Psalm 139:1-6 ¹ *O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. ⁵ You hem me in -- behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. (NIV)*

d. Immutable (never changing)

Malachi 3:6 ⁶ *I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. (NIV)*

Hebrews 13:8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (NIV)*

James 1:17 *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (NIV)*

e. Eternal, infinite, limitless

Psalm 90:1-2 ¹ *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. ² Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (NIV)*

f. Holy

Revelation 15:3-4 *And sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (NIV)*

Psalm 145:7 *They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. (NIV)*

1 Peter 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (NIV)*

1 John 1:5 *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (NIV)*

g. Just

Acts 17:31 *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (NIV)*

Psalm 96:13 *They will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. (NIV)*

h. Love

Ephesians 2:4-5 *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved. (NIV)*

i. Truth

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (NIV)*

j. Good

Psalm 145:9, 15-16 *The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works. The eyes of all look to You. And You give them their food in due time.*

Acts 14:17 *Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (NIV)*

k. Patient

Exodus 34:6 *And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, (NIV)*

Romans 15:5 *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, (NIV)*

l. Faithful

Lamentations 3:22-23 *Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

III. A Psalm about the Nature and Character of God

Now turn to Psalm 139, a psalm that not only describes the attributes and character of God, but also how we should respond. Read the entire Psalm, following this outline:

The Revelation of God - v. 1-18

1. How well does God know me? God is Omniscient - v. 1-6
2. How close is God to me? God is Omnipresent - v. 7-12
3. How creatively has God made me? God is Omnipotent - v. 13-18

My Response to God - v. 19-24

Psalm 139:1-24 *O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. ⁵ You hem me in -- behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I*

go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.¹⁹ If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you?²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (NIV)

In the space below, record specific insights you learned from this Psalm.

Suggested Reading

Knowing God, J. I. Packer (InterVarsity Press)

The Holiness of God, R. C. Sproul (Tyndale Publishers)

Loving God, Charles Colson (Zondervan Publishing Company)