

# Old Testament Theology (part 2)

## God Revealed and Approached

God is the Creator, and He fully knows and understands all He has made, including us (see Psalm 139:1-3, 15-16). Mankind doesn't naturally know God – we need Him to reveal Himself to us (Luke 10:22). "If we are to know God at all, it is necessary that he reveal himself to us."<sup>1</sup> We cannot know Him fully, as we are fully known, but through revelation, we can grow in our knowledge of Him.

It is more than gathering information about God – it is to allow our lives to be shaped by our knowledge of Him. We can know God personally!

### GOD REVEALED

There are two ways God reveals Himself:

1. **General Revelation:** God is revealed through all He has made (Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:18-20) This revelation of God is common to all mankind.
2. **Special Revelation:** God is revealed through Scripture and through being actively involved in people's lives.

God is revealed in many ways in Scripture. One way is through the names for God.

- **El<sup>2</sup> Eliyōn** – God, the most high (Genesis 14:20)
- **El Shaddāi** – God Almighty (Exodus 6:3)
- **El Olaim** – God the Everlasting One (Genesis 21:33)
- **El Elohey Yisra'el** – God, the God of Israel (Genesis 33:20)
- **El Roi** – The God that Sees (Genesis 18:25)
- **El Ehad** – The One God (Malachi 2:10)
- **El Hane'eman** – The Faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9)
- **El Hakkavōd** – The God of Glory (Psalm 29:3)
  
- **Jehovah<sup>3</sup> Yir'eh** – The Lord Provides (Genesis 22:14)
- **Jehovah Nissiy** – The Lord is my Banner (Exodus 17:14)
- **Jehovah Tsidqēnū** – Our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6)
- **Jehovah Shalōm** – The Lord is my Peace (Judges 6:24)
- **Jehovah Shammah** – The Lord is There (Ezekiel 48:35)
- **Jehovah Tsaba'ōth** – The Lord of Hosts (Isaiah 1:24)
- **Jehovah Raph'a** – The Lord who Heals (Exodus 15:26)
- **Jehovah M'Kaddesh** – Makes Holy (Leviticus 20:8)
- **Jehovah Rōhiy** – The Lord my Shepherd (Psalm 23:1)

Other names include Judge, Mighty One, Branch, Holy One, Deliverer, Redeemer, Saviour, Shield, Rock, King, Ancient of Days, and Immanuel (God with us). Together they build up a picture – a revelation of what God is like.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, 'Systematic Theology' (p149)

<sup>2</sup> The word 'El' (אֱלֹהִים) was a general term for 'god', including idols. It occurs about 2800 times – 2550 referring to the true God

<sup>3</sup> The word 'Jehovah' (יהוה) was a covenant name revealed to Moses (Exodus 6:2-3). Considered too holy to be spoken, it was written as four letters (The Tetragrammaton) without vowel marks, and was substituted with 'Ha Shem' (The Name) or 'Adonai' (Lord)

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**Calling** means 'Appearance of God'. An example is Genesis 3:8 "*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.*"<sup>4</sup> This is taken to be a physical appearance of God (the pre-incarnate Jesus). Others include:

- Genesis 16 – The messenger who appears is referred to as "the Lord God"
- Genesis 18 – One of the three men who visit Abraham is called "The Lord" (Jehovah)
- Genesis 32 – Jacob wrestles with a man and says, "I saw God face to face"
- Exodus 3 – The messenger in the burning bush is revealed as "God"
- Joshua 5 – Joshua worships the "Commander of the Lord's army"
- Daniel 10 – A "man" appears to Daniel by the river Tigris

There is also a Theophany in non-human form in Genesis 17:17 (*note the presence of God revealed in fire*)

## GOD APPROACHED

God reveals Himself generally and specifically, but also desires intimate relationship with people. God approached involves Him drawing near to Man, and Man drawing near to Him.

### The Burning Bush – Exodus 3

God's presence is shown in the supernatural fire. God drew near to Moses, then Moses drew near to God's presence. However, He was kept at a safe distance and told to remove his sandals, "*for the place where you are standing is holy ground.*"

Moses was fearful because he believed that you couldn't look on God's presence and live.

### The Burning Mountain – Exodus 19

At Mount Sinai, Moses was now able to approach God fully, face-to-face (Exodus 33:11) As with the bush, God's presence is revealed by fire: "*Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire.*" (Ex 19:18) God is seen by the Israelites as a terrifying, awesome, powerful, yet distant God. Apart from Moses, only the priests could approach God, and they had to consecrate themselves first.

### The Burning Tent – Exodus 40

When the Israelites were ready to move from Sinai, God commanded them to build the Tabernacle (which would house the Ark of the Covenant, where God would dwell). God had moved from being distant to being with His people. Any Israelites could enter the courtyard. Any priest could enter the Holy Place, but only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place one a year.

Exodus ends with these words, "*The cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during their travels.*" (Ex 40:38)

## AT ONEMENT WITH GOD

To ensure the Israelites' safety, God gave them two annual rituals:

- *The Passover*
- *The Day of Atonement*

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<sup>4</sup> NB. This can also be translated, "*The man and his wife heard the voice of the Lord God coming in garden in the cool of the day,*" making the Theophany somewhat ambiguous. It is important to take time to find out the different ways such verses can be translated, and consult commentaries and Church history before making a decision on the meaning.

# Old Testament Theology (part 2)

## The Passover

God protected the Israelites during the last plague in Egypt. Exodus 12 gives the full details of what took place. It involved killing a lamb and putting its blood around the door of the house.

- Substitution                      The death of the lamb was taken as a substitution for the life of those within the house
- Satisfaction                      God saw the blood on the door and passed over (Ex 12:13) – he was satisfied with the blood, rather than with those in the house
- Safety                              God then protected those in the house from the destroying angel

The yearly Passover feast was not to keep the people safe, but to remind them that God had already kept them safe, and would continue to do so.

## The Day of Atonement

The other ritual is different. This is detailed in Leviticus 16 and involved the following steps:

- The High Priest would sacrifice a bull to atone for his sins and those of his family.
- Taking two live goats, he would cast lots to see which would die
- The unlucky goat would be sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the Atonement Cover<sup>5</sup> in the Holy of Holies
- The live goat would be brought before the people. The High Priest would lay his hands on its head and confess the sins of Israel, then the goat would be sent off into the wilderness, bearing the sins of the people (Psalm 103:12)

The Day of Atonement was not to make the Israelites feel safe, but was to take away their sins so that God could remain among them, and He could be approached.

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<sup>5</sup> The Atonement Cover was part of the Ark of the Covenant, and it was the place where God dwelt. "*I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.*" (Leviticus 16:2)