



Hello, My Name is...
 Week #1: The Power of Naming

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|----------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------|
| September 14th | The Power of Naming | (Chapter 1) |
| September 21st | The Two Bedrock Names of God | (Chapter 2) |
| September 28th | What's in a Name? | (Chapter 3) |
| October 5th | The Earned Names of God | (Chapter 4) |
| October 12th | When an Image Becomes a Name | (Chapter 5) |
| October 19th | How Jesus Shows Up in the Old Testament | (Chapter 6) |
| October 26th | How the Father Shows Up in the New Testament | (Chapter 7) |
| November 2nd | There is Power in His Name, Part I | (Chapter 8a) |
| November 9th | There is Power in His Name, Part II | (Chapter 8b) |
| November 16th | The Eternal Spirit Himself | (Chapter 9) |

The Power of Naming

SL#2

FACT: HUMANS USE THE POWER OF NAMING TO IDENTIFY ITEMS, PERSONS, AND CHARACTERISTICS.

SL#3

- **Naming an object to Honor a Person, not to Identify the object:**

Sandwich – Earl of Sandwich

John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, [PC](#), [FRS](#) (13 November 1718 – 30 April 1792)^[1] was a British [statesman](#) who succeeded his grandfather [Edward Montagu, 3rd Earl of Sandwich](#) as the [Earl of Sandwich](#) in 1729, at the age of ten.

During his life, he held various military and political offices, including [Postmaster General](#), [First Lord of the Admiralty](#), and [Secretary of State for the Northern Department](#). He is also known for the claim that he was the [eponymous](#) inventor of the [sandwich](#).

The modern [sandwich](#) is named after Lord Sandwich, but the exact circumstances of its invention and original use are still the subject of debate. A rumour in a contemporaneous travel book called *Tour to London* by [Pierre-Jean Grosley](#) formed the popular myth that bread and meat sustained Lord Sandwich at the [gambling](#) table^[2] but Sandwich had many bad habits, including the [Hellfire Club](#), and any story may be a creation after the fact. Lord Sandwich was a very conversant gambler, the story goes, and he did not take the time to have a meal during his long hours playing at the card table. Consequently, he would ask his servants to bring him slices of meat between two slices of bread, a habit well known among his gambling friends. **Other people, according to this account, began to order "the same as Sandwich!",** and thus the "sandwich" was born.^{[3][1][full citation needed]} The sober alternative to this account is provided by Sandwich's biographer [N. A. M. Rodger](#), who suggests that Sandwich's commitments to the [navy](#), to politics, and to the arts mean that the first sandwich was more likely to have been consumed at his work desk.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Montagu,_4th_Earl_of_Sandwich

SL#4

- **Naming from a Characteristic I.E.**

hiccup (n.)

1570s, *hickop*, earlier *hicket*, *hycock*, "a word meant to imitate the sound produced by the convulsion of the diaphragm" [Abram Smythe Palmer, "Folk-Etymology," London, 1882]. Compare French *hoquet*, Danish *hikke*, Persian *hikuk*, Hindi *hichki*, etc. Modern spelling first recorded 1788; An Old English word for it was *ælfsgoða*, so called because hiccups were thought to be caused by elves.

hiccup (v.)

1570s; see **hiccup** (n.). **Entries linking to hiccup**

hic

imitation of the sound of hiccups, attested by 1883 (see **hiccup**).

hiccough



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1620s, a more recent variant of **hiccup** (q.v.) by mistaken association with *cough*.

hiccups (n.)

a bout of hiccupping, by 1723; see **hiccup** (n.). This often also was called *hiccup* or *the hiccup*. An earlier word for it (noun and verb) was *yex*, imitative, from Old English *gesca*, *geosca*.

[MAY HAVE STARTED AS “YES” BUT IT SOUNDED LIKE A “COUGH” SO WHICH WORD WON OUT?]

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/hiccup>

SL#5

• **Naming as a declaration:**

- The Hebrews believed that naming something was to encompass and control it.
- Name given to children were defining of where they came from, who they are, their characteristics, and what is their potential.

Example: Caleb Abrahamson

Example: 1 Samuel 1:20

²⁰ *So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel [Heard by God], saying, “Because I have asked for him from the Lord.”*

Examples:

Son = Carl-son, John-son, etc.

Bar = the son of

Matthew 16:17

Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Ben = son (Benjamin = son of my right hand (Genesis 19:38).

John (the Baptist) Luke 1

Jesus (Luke 2)

Simon to Peter (John 1)

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SL#6

- What does the name listed in scripture signify?
 - Does His name being present at a place = Him being there? **Presence**
 - Or is it just named after Him? **Name**
 - Or is there an essence of Him? **Essence**
 - Is it the Glory of the Lord?

SL#7

2 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁷ *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

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.



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¹⁷ The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

SL#8

Quote:

“Name” in biblical usage correctly describes the person, place, or object and indicates the essential character of that to which the name is given.

Elwell & Beitzel (1988). [God, Being and Attributes Of](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 1, pp. 876–888). Baker Book House.

Elwell & Beitzel:

But with regard to the names of God there are considerable differences, and these are most clearly seen when biblical scholars and theologians confront the question of whether the names of God are

#1. ascriptions given by God concerning himself or they are

#2. ascriptions given to God by people who observed His acts and reflected on His character as discerned through a study of divine deeds. [The God who...]

This is now OUR JOB in this series.

#1. Does God state His names to describe...introduce Himself to us?

#2. Or do we assign names to Him by what we see Him do or say?

Dr. Jack Hayford:

In the Bible a name is much more than an identifier, as it tends to be in our culture. Personal names (and even place names) were formed from words that had their own meaning. Thus, the people of the Bible were very conscious of the “prophetic” meaning of names. They believed there was a vital connection between the name and the person it identified, **for a name somehow represented the nature of the person.**

Knowing another’s name was a special privilege that offered access to that person’s thought and life.

Hayford, J. W. 1995. *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville

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FACT: KNOWING GOD’S NAMES MAKES HIM PERSONAL

Exodus 3:1-7

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.”

⁴ So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!”



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And he said, "Here I am."

⁵ Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." ⁶ Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

⁷ And the Lord said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I **know** their sorrows[pains]."

KNOW. (Ex. 3:7) *yada* (yah-dah); Strong's #3045: To know, to perceive, to distinguish, to recognize, to acknowledge, to be acquainted with; in a few instances to "know intimately," that is, sexually; also to acknowledge, recognize, esteem, and endorse. **When Scripture speaks of God's making known His name, it refers to His revealing (through deeds or events) what His name truly means.** Thus, in 6:3, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as *·El Shaddai*, but by My name *Yahweh* I was not known to them." God did not mean that the patriarchs had never heard the name *Yahweh*, but rather that He did not reveal the full meaning of His name *Yahweh* until the time of Moses and the Exodus. Also (John 8:32) *ginosko* (ghin-occe-koe); Strong's #1097: Compare "prognosis," "gnomic," "gnomon," "gnostic." To perceive, understand, recognize, gain knowledge, realize, come to know. *Ginosko* is the knowledge that has an inception, a progress, and an attainment. It is the recognition of truth by personal experience.

Exodus 6:1-3

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

² And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am[YHWH] the Lord. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty[El Shaddia], but by My name Lord[YHWH-Jehovah] I was not known to them.

Also (John 12:13) *onoma* (on-om-ah); Strong's #3686: Compare "anonymous," "synonym," "onomancy," "onomatology." In general, the word signifies the name or term by which a person or thing is called (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 1:63).

However, it was quite common both in Hebrew and Hellenistic Greek to use *onoma* for all that the name implies, such as rank or authority (Matt. 7:22; John 14:13; Acts 3:6; 4:7), character (Luke 1:49; 11:2; Acts 26:9), reputation (Mark 6:14; Luke 6:22), representative (Matt. 7:22; Mark 9:37). Occasionally, *onoma* is synonymous for an individual, a person (Acts 1:15; Rev. 3:4; 11:13).

Hayford, J. W. 1995. *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville

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FACT: KNOWING GOD'S NAMES KEEPS US FROM BELIEVING FALSEHOODS

ABOUT HIM

Romans 1:21-23

²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be

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wise, they became fools,²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. NKJV

God is irrelevant: He exist as the Supreme God, the Creator of humans, but He is so far removed from everyday life there is no purpose to acknowledging Him.

God is a spiritual being but there are many other spiritual beings as well: Humans growing fascination with the supernatural.

Man came from a supreme cosmos (God) but man is endowed with owning and running every facet of human existence: New Age philosophy – Man knows what to do.

IF there is a Supreme Being, we are not the focus:

The elevation of care for nature and care of animals to be equal with the care of humans.

There is no Supreme Being, we evolved from some type of life force:

Evolution. We came from some type of life force. Who gave that “thing” life? Who created the D.N.A. to make life? Why does D.N.A. have an inner code that tells it what to do?

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FACT: KNOWING GOD’S NAMES INVITES US TO KNOW HIM

Romans 1

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. NKJV

¹⁸ God’s wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodly behavior and the injustice of human beings who silence the truth with injustice. ¹⁹ This is because what is known about God should be plain to them because God made it plain to them. ²⁰ Ever since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—God’s eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God has made. So humans are without excuse. ²¹ Although they knew God, they didn’t honor God as God or thank him. Instead, their reasoning became pointless, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² While they were claiming to be wise, they made fools of themselves. ²³ They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images that look like mortal humans: birds, animals, and reptiles. CEB

Psalm 19:1-4



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Heaven is declaring God's glory;
the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.
² One day gushes the news to the next,
and one night informs another what needs to be known.
³ Of course, there's no speech, no words—
their voices can't be heard—
⁴ but their sound extends throughout the world;
their words reach the ends of the earth. CEB

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament[*expanse of heaven*] shows His handiwork.[*the work of His hands*]
² Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
³ *There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.*
⁴ Their line[*sound, business*] has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world. NKJV

The heavens are telling the glory of God,
and the firmament[**Dome**] proclaims his handiwork.
² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth
and their words to the end of the world. NRSV

NOTEBOOK:

I.E. Now that I know Heaven declares Him... what have I seen of Him in what He has made?
What words do I give to what I have discovered of Him?

What are my personal goal with learning His Names?

I would like to...

I want to learn...

Defining an experience of...

NOTES:

We come now to one of the most memorable psalms in this or any other part of the Psalter. Hardly any of the first eighteen have classic English hymns based on them; this has not one but two, both of which we shall have reason to quote.



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1. Three voices

Of all the myriad voices of creation, the psalmist tunes in to those of the heavens, and among them the sun in particular tells him something about God. In modern times, superstitious people (like the pagans of old) 'hear', by way of astrology, more than the heavens are actually saying, while secular people hear less than they have to tell. For those who are seriously listening for a divine word, the voices of what is called 'natural religion' can be confusing, for the beauty of nature says one thing, its harshness another; but one idea at any rate comes over clearly—**how wonderful must the Maker of all this be!**

Joseph Addison's fine version of these lines, 'The spacious firmament on high', makes the point well. Sun and moon, stars and planets, 'utter forth a glorious voice, For ever singing as they shine, "The hand that made us is divine." ' Incessantly (v. 2) and universally (v. 4) *they pour forth speech*, even though *there is no speech*, and any willing hearer can get the message.

After the **voice of the skies** (vv. 1–6) the **voice of the law** speaks (vv. 7–9). The commentaries detail the meanings of *law* and its five parallel nouns, and the adjectives and verbs that go with them. The six little sentences are worth meditating on; some are quite startling.

With echoes from the New Testament in our ears—'law brings wrath', 'the letter kills'—we may not have imagined *the law of the LORD ... reviving the soul*. But we need to grasp that here in the Old Testament 'law' is a wonderfully comprehensive word, meaning all that God wants us to know about himself. There is no life for the soul without that. *Statutes* are the firm principles to whose validity the Lord testifies. On them simple people like us can build their lives. *Precepts* are precise rules for living: a new thought for some, perhaps, that detailed obedience is the *right* way to *joy*. Similarly *commands*, which have authority and are to be obeyed, sound like unwelcome restraints, yet will lead us out into *radiant ... light*. *Fear* means that what this voice tells us is, in both senses of the word, venerable: time-honoured truth, permanently valid, and therefore to be revered. *Ordinances* are in Moffatt's translation *rulings*, God's decisions on practical questions of human behaviour. They are *righteous*, not *altogether* (meaning 'absolutely'), but 'all together' (meaning 'the whole lot')!

Law might seem an unlikely source of delight; yet, as the transitional verse 10 says, for God's servant that is what it is. His is the third voice, which now speaks in verses 11–14.

He hears the first two voices rightly, because he has a right relationship with the Lord. He is the Lord's *servant*, as he says twice, and the Lord is his *Rock* and *Redeemer*. He is well aware of his sin (vv. 12–13), but, to anticipate what Jesus says in Matthew 5:48, he would like to be perfect as his God is perfect (for that word in v. 7 is the word for *blameless* in v. 13)—particularly in his speech, since that motif has run through the rest of the psalm.

2. One theme

The obvious differences between verses 1–6 and the rest persuade some commentators that Psalm 19 could not have been composed as a single poem, that the two parts separately represent two different types of psalm, and that when combined they are something of a hybrid.

C. S. Lewis, as a specialist and a professional not in biblical but in literary studies, and as a poet himself, took a different view. To his mind, the psalmist felt



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so close a connection ... between his first theme and his second that he passed from one to the other without realising ... First he thinks of the sky ... Then he thinks of the sun ... Finally, of its heat; not of course the mild heats of our climate but the cloudless, blinding, tyrannous rays hammering the hills, searching every cranny ... Then at once, in verse 7 he is talking of something else, which hardly seems to him something else because it is so like the all-piercing, all-detecting sunshine.

Lewis had written similarly, in an earlier book, of 'that glorious, *sustained* image from the 19th Psalm where the Sun and the Law became fused in the poet's mind, both rejoicing, both like a giant, like a bridegroom, both "undefiled," "clean," "right," and "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof" '.

A second feature binds the psalm into one. **The fact that the Deity is called *God* in its first part, and *the Lord* in its second part, is a pointer towards rather than away from its unity.** It is precisely the limitation of the voice of his world that it can tell us only about God the Creator; we have to heed the voice of his law to learn that he is also the Lord, the Redeemer.

And behind that observation lies a deeper unity yet, shown to us in a second scripture which runs parallel to this one.

3. *Two scriptures*

Whatever is meant by the words *of David* at the head of these psalms, we have seen how readily we can find appropriate settings in the history of David's time for most of the first eighteen. Psalm 19 is not so easy to place, unless the germ of it was there in the shepherd boy's sunlit days (and starlit nights for Ps. 8?) on the hills of Bethlehem.

But if now one were planning a service in which psalms, hymns, and readings were all to be integrated, so as to highlight God's message and focus his people's attention on it (an important responsibility for church leaders, in my view), how should one go about it? With this psalm as starting point, two or three hymns would choose themselves: Addison's, as quoted above, or even closer to the psalm as a whole, Isaac Watts's:

The heavens declare thy glory, Lord;
In every star thy wisdom shines;
But when our eyes behold thy word,
We read thy name in fairer lines.

A scripture reading, though? The books of Samuel, with their many parallels to earlier psalms, here seem to fail us. Well, Romans 10:18 quotes verse 4 of this psalm, and Paul has already spoken in Romans 1 of the voice that all can hear: 'What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse' (vv. 19–20).

This in turn leads us to an obvious Old Testament reading, namely the creation narratives of Genesis. The God who has brought David through much political turmoil and enthroned him in Jerusalem (1 and 2 Sam. provide the relevant readings), is still his Rock and Redeemer in Psalm 19 as in Psalm 18, but his poetic inspiration is now free to range further afield, and to take up the



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themes of other scriptures. Where better to start than with Genesis 1? The heavens and the *firmament* of our verse 1 (NRSV), and the sun of verses 4–6, are all there (Gen. 1:1, 6, 16).

Follow the reading through, however. The God who ‘created the heavens and the earth’ in chapter 1 is in chapter 2 ‘the LORD God’ who ‘commanded the man’, giving him a law which if he obeyed it would ensure his happiness. There we find verses 7–10 of the psalm. And verses 11–14? Chapter 3 of Genesis shows how easily the human heart can be seduced by yet another voice, that of the Tempter. If Adam and Eve, who in one sense knew better than we do both *the glory of God* and *the law of the LORD*, could trade in these things for the illusory gratifications of sin, how much more should we pray to be kept in the law and away from the illusion?²

hypostatically]?

Hypostasis ([Greek](#): ὑπόστασις, *hypóstasis*) is the underlying state or underlying substance and is the fundamental [reality](#) that supports all else. In [Neoplatonism](#) the hypostasis of the [soul](#), the intellect (*nous*) and "the one" was addressed by [Plotinus](#).^[1] In [Christian theology](#), the [Holy Trinity](#) consists of three *hypostases*: Hypostasis of the [Father](#), Hypostasis of the [Son](#), and Hypostasis of the [Holy Spirit](#).^[2]

- To help us understand divided into categories (personally, I do not ‘see’ this):

The Primary Names of God, Titles, Descriptive, Similes, Metaphors, Images.

Primary Names and Titles of Jesus & Names and Titles & Images of the Holy Spirit

DEUTERONISTIC:

The main hypothesis of Name Theology states that Dtr had modified the earlier belief that God dwelt in the temple locally, instead claiming that the deity was only **hypostatically**(ESSENCE) present via the name. In 1947, von Rad popularized the Name Theology concept in *Studies in Deuteronomy*. He asserted, “The Deuteronomic theologumenon of the name of Jahweh ... is a theological corrective. **It is not Jahweh himself who is present at the shrine, but only his name....** Deuteronomy is replacing the old crude idea of Jahweh’s presence and dwelling at the shrine by a theologically sublimated idea” (von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 38–39).

GLORY:

Moreover, von Rad claimed a well-attested, pre-deuteronomic concept of a “Kabod-Moed” (i.e. “glory theology”) theology existed which claimed that Yahweh’s glory was present at the shrine via the ark of the covenant. Wherever the ark was, Yahweh’s presence was too.

According to von Rad, the later Priestly Document (P) had a different theology with regard to Yahweh’s presence.

TENT OF MEETING:

Von Rad stated that the “tent of meeting” in P depicts Yahweh as coming down and meeting with Israel by means of the “glory of Yahweh” and the “cloud.”

Yeo, J. J. (2016). [Name Theology](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

² Wilcock, M. (2001). [The Message of Psalms: Songs for the People of God](#) (J. A. Motyer, Ed.; Vol. 1, pp. 71–74). Inter-Varsity Press.



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The Biblical Idea of Name. In the Scriptures the name and person of God are inseparably related. This is in keeping with the biblical conception of what a name signifies.

In the Hebrew language, the term for “name” most probably meant “sign” or “distinctive mark.” In the Greek language, “name” (*onoma*) is derived from a verb which means “to know”; a name then indicates that by which a person or object is to be known. But the idea of name is not to be taken in the sense of a label or an arbitrary means of identifying or specifying a person, place, or object. **“Name” in biblical usage correctly describes the person, place, or object and indicates the essential character of that to which the name is given.**

Adam names the animals according to their nature (Gn 2:19, 20);

“Noah” means “one who brings relief and comfort” (5:29);

“Jesus” means “savior” (Mt 1:21).

When a person was given a new position or a radical change took place in his life a new name was given to indicate that new aspect, for example,

Abraham (“father of many,” Gn 17:5); and Israel (“one who strives with God” or “God strives,” 32:28). The name of a person or people expressed what the person or people thought the proper description or statement of character was.

But with regard to the names of God there are considerable differences, and these are most clearly seen when biblical scholars and theologians confront the question of whether the names of God are ascriptions given by God concerning himself or they are ascriptions given to God by people who observed his acts and reflected on his character as discerned through a study of divine deeds.

Some scholars consider the names of God as human ascriptions. They choose to speak about God as unknowable; they speak of the names and attributes of God as limiting concepts and as hindrances to a fuller understanding of the God who is only known by acts and events. The suggestion is that people should study the acts of God in the present as well as past rather than pay too much attention to the names and attributes ascribed to God by people of ancient times. This view implies that God is still revealing himself as he did in biblical times.

Evangelical scholars, however, insist that the Bible clearly states that God employs names to reveal himself. No one name God employs states all that can be said by God about himself; in fact, all the names taken together do not reveal all that God is. God is infinite; he cannot be fully known. But he has revealed much concerning himself, so much that if one studies the names of God one is struck by the greatness, holiness, majesty, glory, indescribable goodness, and justice of God. And, it should be added, evangelical biblical scholars and theologians are quick to assert that a study of the acts of God increases one’s understanding of the self-revealing names and attributes. These same evangelical scholars, while disagreeing with Emil Brunner on some aspects of his view concerning divine revelation, readily agree with him when he writes that if one point is clear from the outset it is that God is not an object which man can manipulate by means of verbal activity or reasoning: “God is mystery in the depths of ‘inaccessible light ...’ God’s name is wonderful” (Jgs 13:18).

¹⁸ *And the Angel of the Lord said to him, “Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?”*

Why ask about it? The answer is that by his name(s) God has chosen to reveal himself. But, the better we know God, the more we know and feel that his Mystery is unfathomable” (*Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 117).



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At this point, it should be stated that there is a difference of opinion among biblical scholars and theologians on how to classify the names, ascriptions, descriptions, and attributes of God. For example, J. Calvin and C. Hodge do not discuss the names of God except as they aid in the understanding of his attributes. Others, such as A. Kuyper, have separate discussions of God's attributes and names. H. Bavinck and L. Berkhof deal with the nature of God under three headings: (1) proper names, (2) essential names, and (3) personal names. If one consults these works and goes on to those of scholars like A. Jukes, H. Stevenson, L.S. Chafer, and a group of works designated biblical theology, one would conclude that the names (in the broadest sense) fall into six categories:

- (1) Proper names: El, Yahweh, Adonai, Theos, Kurios (God).
- (2) Personal names: Father, Abba, Son, Jesus, Holy Spirit.
- (3) Titles: Creator, Messiah/Christ, Paraclete/Comforter.
- (4) Essential names: Light, Love, Spirit.
- (5) Descriptive names: Rock, Ba'al, Master, Rabboni, Shepherd.
- (6) Attributes: names of virtues or characteristics of the triune God-head.

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [God, Being and Attributes Of](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 1, pp. 876–888). Baker Book House.

IN A NAME?

The Hebrews believed that naming something was to encompass and control it. Names of children, thus, spoke of the “essence” of children—their attributes, identities, or distinguishing characteristics.

In the Old Testament, there are more than fifty examples in which children are given names that have a meaning. Some of these relate to events associated with the child's birth or conception (Gen. 17:19; 25:26; 1 Sam. 4:21). The Lord commanded Hosea to name his children as part of a prophetic message to Israel (Hos. 1:4, 6, 9)—Jezreel meaning “my punishment,” Lo-Ruhamah meaning “not loved,” and Lo-Ammi meaning “not my people.”

Names also frequently referred to a child's lineage. The Aramaic word “bar” means “the son of”—so that Bartimaeus means “son of Timaeus” (Mark 10:46). The Hebrew word “ben” also means “son” and is frequently linked to a circumstance or situation. For example, Ben-ammi means the “son of my people,” Benoni is “the son of my trouble,” and Benjamin is “the son of my right hand” (see Gen. 19:38, 35:18).

In some cases, parents in the Bible are told specifically what to name their children, perhaps most notably in the case of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57–66) and Jesus (Luke 2:21). A change in a person's name nearly always refers to a change in that person's character or identity, such as when Jesus changed the name of Simon to Peter (John 1:42).

See also Matt. 18:3, note; notes on Children (2 Sam. 21; Ps. 128; Prov. 22; Luke 15); Family (Gen. 32; 1 Sam. 3; Ps. 78; 127); Inheritance (Prov. 13); Traditions (1 Sam. 7)

3

Jack Hayford, author of many choruses and worship songs, including the modern classic “Majesty,” has said: “Few principles are more essential to our understanding than this one: the presence of God's kingdom power is directly related to the practice of God's praise. The verb ‘enthroned’ indicates that whenever God's people exalt His name, He is ready to manifest His kingdom's power in the way most appropriate to the situation, as His rule is invited to invade our setting.

“It is this fact that properly leads many to conclude that in a very real way, praise prepares a *specific* and *present* place for God among His people. Some have chosen the term ‘establish His throne’ to describe this ‘enthroning’ of God in our midst by our worshiping and praising welcome. God awaits the prayerful and praise-filled worship of His people as an entry point for His kingdom to ‘come’—to enter, that *His* ‘will be done’ in human circumstances (see [Luke 11:2–4](#); [Ps. 93:2](#)). We do not manipulate God, but align ourselves with the great kingdom truth: *His* is the power, ours is the privilege (and responsibility) to welcome Him into our world—our private, present world or the circumstances of our society.”⁸

³Thomas Nelson, I. 1997, c1995. *Woman's study Bible*. (Is 46:1). Thomas Nelson: Nashville



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~~In the Bible a name is much more than an identifier, as it tends to be in our culture. Personal names (and even place names) were formed from words that had their own meaning. Thus, the people of the Bible were very conscious of the “prophetic” meaning of names. They believed there was a vital connection between the name and the person it identified, for a name somehow represented the nature of the person.~~

This means that the naming of a baby was very important in the Bible. In choosing a name, the parents could reflect the circumstances of the child’s birth, their own feelings, their gratitude to God, their hopes and prayers for the child, and their commitment of the child to God. The name Isaac reflected the “laughter” of his mother at his birth (Gen. 21:6). Esau was named “hairy” because of his appearance. Jacob was named “supplanter” because he grasped his brother Esau’s heel (Gen. 25:25-26). Moses received his name because he was “drawn out” of the water (Ex. 2:10).

A popular custom of Bible times was to compose names by using the shortened forms of the divine name El or Ya (Je) as the beginning or ending syllable. Examples of this practice are Elisha, which means “God is salvation”; Daniel, “God is my judge”; Jehoiakim, “the Lord has established”; and Isaiah, “the Lord is salvation.”

Sometimes very specialized names, directly related to circumstances of the parents, were given to children. The prophet Isaiah was directed to name one of his children Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning “speed the spoil, hasten the prey.” This name was an allusion to the certain Assyrian invasion of the nation of Judah (Is. 8:3-4). Hosea was instructed to name a daughter Lo-Ruhamah, “no mercy,” and a son Lo-Ammi, “not my people.” Both these names referred to God’s displeasure with His people (Hos. 1:6-9).

The change of a name can also be of great importance in the Bible. Abram’s name was changed to Abraham in connection with his new calling to be “a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5). God gave Jacob the new name Israel (“God strives”) because he “struggled with God and with men, and...prevailed” (Gen. 32:28; 35:10).

In the giving or taking of new names, often a crucial turning point in the person’s life has been reached. Simon was given the name Peter because, as the first confessing apostle, the faith he expressed was the “rock” upon which the new community of the church would be built (Matt. 16:18). Saul was renamed Paul, a Greek name that was appropriate for one who was destined to become the great apostle to the Gentiles.

The New Testament writers also emphasized the importance of names and the close relationship between names and what they mean. A striking illustration of this is Acts 4:12: “For there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.” In this instance the name is again practically interchangeable with the reality which it represents.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Hallowed be Your name” (Matt. 6:9). Christians were described by the apostle Paul as those who “name the name of the Lord” (2 Tim. 2:19). A true understanding of the exalted Jesus is often connected with a statement about His name. Thus, Jesus “has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name” than the angels (Heb. 1:4). According to Paul, “God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

5

Deut 18:5

⁵ For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever.

NAME. (Deut. 18:5) *shem* (*shem*); *Strong’s #8034*:

Name, renown, fame, memorial, character. Possibly *shem* comes from a root that suggests “marking” or “branding.” Thus a person was named because of something that marked him, whether physical features, or accomplishments he had made or was expected to make.

⁴Hayford, J. W. 1997, c1995. *Answering the Call to Evangelism : Spreading the Good News to Everyone*. Spirit-Filled Life Kingdom Dynamics Study Guides (Page 156). Thomas Nelson: Nashville

⁵Hayford, J. W. 1995. *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville



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Shem appears more than eight hundred times in the Old Testament, its most important use being in the phrase “the name of the LORD,” sometimes abbreviated to *ha-shem* (“the name,” that is, *Yahweh*). See Leviticus 24:11, where one man blasphemed “the name,” meaning that he blasphemed the Lord. Thus, in Judaic tradition, *Yahweh* God is often simply called *hashem*.

Also (John 12:13) *onoma* (on-om-ah); *Strong’s #3686*: Com-pare “anonymous,” “synonym,” “onomancy,” “onomatology.” In general, the word signifies the name or term by which a person or thing is called (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 1:63).

However, it was quite common both in Hebrew and Hellenistic Greek to use *onoma* for all that the name implies, such as rank or authority (Matt. 7:22; John 14:13; Acts 3:6; 4:7), character (Luke 1:49; 11:2; Acts 26:9), reputation (Mark 6:14; Luke 6:22), representative (Matt. 7:22; Mark 9:37). Occasionally, *onoma* is synonymous for an individual, a person (Acts 1:15; Rev. 3:4; 11:13).

GOD, NAMES OF—the titles or designations given to God throughout the Bible. In the ancient world, **knowing another’s name was a special privilege that offered access to that person’s thought and life.** God favored His people by revealing Himself by several names which offered special insight into His love and righteousness.

Jehovah/Yahweh. The most frequent name used for God in the Old Testament is Yahweh, or Jehovah, from the verb “to be,” meaning simply but profoundly, “I am who I am,” and “I will be who I will be.” The four-letter Hebrew word (called the tetragrammaton) *YHWH* was the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). This bush itself was a vivid symbol of the inexhaustible dynamism of God, who burns like a fire with love and righteousness, yet remains the same and never diminishes. English translations of the Bible translate the word as Lord Jehovah, or Yahweh.

As the author of life and salvation, God’s “I am” expresses the fact that He is the infinite and original personal God who is behind the existence of everything and to whom everything must finally be traced. This name, “I am who I am,” signals the truth that nothing else defines who God is but God Himself. What He says and does is who He is. The inspired Scriptures are the infallible guide to understanding who God is by what He says about Himself and what He does.

Moses was called to proclaim deliverance to the people and was told by God, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Ex. 3:14). In the deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, God revealed a deeper significance to His name. But He had already disclosed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as Yahweh. Each of them had called on the name of the Lord (Yahweh) (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; Ex. 3:15) as the God who protects and blesses. Yet Exodus 6:3 shows that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know the fuller meaning of Yahweh, which was to be revealed to Moses and the Hebrew people in the Exodus experience.

The divine name Yahweh is usually translated Lord in English versions of the Bible, because it became a practice in late Old Testament Judaism not to pronounce the sacred name YHWH, but to say instead “my Lord” (Adonai)—a practice still used today in the synagogue. When the vowels of Adonai were attached to the consonants YHWH in the medieval period, the word Jehovah resulted. Today, many Christians use the word Yahweh, the more original pronunciation, not hesitating to name the divine name since Jesus taught believers to speak in a familiar way to God.

The following are other names in honor of the Lord in the Old Testament that stem from the basic name of Yahweh:

Jehovah-jireh. This name is translated as “The-LORD-Will-Provide,” commemorating the provision of the ram in place of Isaac for Abraham’s sacrifice (Gen. 22:14).

Jehovah-nissi. This name means “The-LORD-Is-My-Banner,” in honor of God’s defeat of the Amalekites (Ex. 17:15).

Jehovah-shalom. This phrase means “The-LORD-Is-Peace,” the name Gideon gave the altar which he built in Ophrah (Judg. 6:24).

Jehovah-shammah. This phrase expresses the truth that “The-LORD-Is-There,” referring to the city which the prophet Ezekiel saw in his vision (Ezek. 48:35).

Jehovah-tsebaoth. This name, translated “The-LORD-of-hosts,” was used in the days of David and the prophets, witnessing to God the Savior who is surrounded by His hosts of heavenly power (1 Sam. 1:3).

⁶Hayford, J. W. 1995. *Hayford’s Bible handbook*. Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville



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Jehovah Elohe Israel. This name means “LORD-God-of-Israel,” and it appears in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Psalms. Other names similar to this are *Netsah Israel*, “The Strength of Israel” (1 Sam. 15:29); and *Abir Yisrael*, “The Mighty One of Israel” (Is. 1:24).

El. El, by itself, refers to a God in the most general sense. In the Bible the word is often defined properly by a qualifier like Jehovah: “I, the LORD (Jehovah) your God (Elohim), am a jealous God (El)” (Deut. 5:9).

Elohim. Elohim is the plural form of El, but it is usually translated in the singular. Some scholars have held that the plural represents an intensified form for the supreme God; others believe it describes the supreme God and His heavenly court of created beings. Still others hold that the plural form refers to the triune God of Genesis 1:13, who works through Word and Spirit in the creation of the world. All agree that the plural form Elohim does convey the sense of the one supreme being who is the only true God.

7

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Every Name of God in the Bible*, the eighth in Nelson’s “Everything in the Bible” series. Like other books in this series, this book is intended to serve as a resource for those studying God’s Word. Yet this, as the other books, has also been written for your personal enrichment. This is especially true for this book, which explores God’s revelation of Himself through names, titles, and images found in Scripture.

For those who want to know God better, there is hardly a richer approach than to explore the names, the titles, the similes, and the metaphors through which God has presented Himself to us in both testaments. **These unveil the essence of who God is, they describe His qualities and character, and they depict His work both in this universe and in our lives.**

For most of human history, names given the deity by pagans served to distance human beings from the one true God. And then God stepped in, to reveal Himself to His Old Testament people. Three chapters of this book trace God’s revelation of His true self through the names, titles, and images found in the Old Testament. Another chapter examines the names and titles specifically ascribed to Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, while additional chapters focus on the names and titles given each person of the Trinity in the New Testament. How wonderfully each name and title opens a new window through which we can gaze on our Lord in awe and wonder, and respond with thanksgiving and love.

Three added features make this book especially valuable. The first is an Expository Index, which organizes names and titles alphabetically under several headings, and which guides you to pages where they are discussed.

The second feature, Appendix A, is a summary of what we know about God as He has revealed Himself to us. This appendix is in the form of a creed—a statement of what we can and do firmly believe about God based on His Word.

The third special feature is found in Appendix B, where a variety of special issues growing out of our study are discussed. For instance, the Scripture presents God as a loving and compassionate person, and yet we also see Him as a God who is angered by and will surely judge sin. How can a loving God also be a God of wrath? God is also said to be just and righteous. How can such a

⁷Hayford, J. W. 1995. *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville



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God freely forgive sin? And, God is said to be both good and all-powerful. How then can evil infect His universe? Such issues are explored in Appendix B in articles on God's wrath, on forgiveness, and on God's relationship to evil. In addition, mysteries like the Incarnation and the Trinity are explored here. And in each case, Scripture provides satisfying answers to supposed contradictions in the nature of the God who has revealed Himself so powerfully in the names, titles, similes, and metaphors found in the Bible.

What you read here then will show you fresh and exciting ways to deepen your understanding of God and your relationship with the Lord. What you read here will also confirm your certainty that God can be trusted, and that any supposed contradiction others may cite has a satisfying answer already revealed in the wonderful, reliable, and trustworthy Word of God.

CHAPTER 1



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

- DOES "RELIGION" DEMONSTRATE MAN'S SEARCH FOR GOD?
- WHY DO MEN MAKE GODS IN THEIR IMAGE?
- WHAT CAN BE KNOWN ABOUT GOD FROM NATURE?
- HOW DO WE RECOVER KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUE GOD?

Find a globe map of the world. Spin it, and let your finger fall at random. Any place your finger falls, in any era of history or prehistory, people who live there will speak about "god" or "gods."

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that what the peoples of Africa, China, South America, Europe, or the Ancient Middle East mean by "god" is what we mean when we use that word. The word "god" has had different meanings to peoples of differing times and places.

In this chapter we'll take a look at various peoples' **idea of "god."** And we'll suggest why so many notions about God have emerged in human history. **This survey is extremely important, for only when we understand humankind's various conceptions of "god" can we grasp the significance of Scripture's revelation of the names and titles of God.** Only when we see what humanity has done to distort the image of the deity will we grasp what knowing His names and titles can mean to us in our own personal relationship with the Lord.

RELIGION AND HUMANKIND

In his book *Religions of the World*, Lewis M. Hopfe notes that religion is a universal phenomenon. He writes,

Wherever people are found, there too religion resides. Occasionally religion is hard to find or pin down, but in the great metropolitan capitals and in the most primitive areas of the world, there are physical and cultural temples, pyramids, megaliths, and monuments that societies have raised at tremendous expense as an expression of their religion. Even when we explore the backwaters of time in prehistoric civilizations, we find altars, cave paintings, and special burials that point toward our religious nature.

Indeed, there is no other phenomenon so pervasive, so consistent from society to society, as the search for gods (p. 6).



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But is the religious nature of human beings evidence of a “search for gods”? Or is it evidence of something else? In Romans 1 the apostle Paul offers a unique explanation for man’s preoccupation with religion. Paul teaches that God has implanted awareness within the human spirit that there is a reality beyond the material universe, and that a “god” or “gods” exist.



Paul’s argument is stated succinctly. “What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19, 20). On the one hand this argument is logical: the creation testifies to a Creator, who in order to create what now exists must be both personal and powerful. We might liken the created universe to a powerful radio station sending out a clear and unmistakable signal. This thought is reflected in Psalm 19:1–4,

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.

But there is an even more significant element here. Paul says that God has manifested Himself “in” people (Rom. 1:19). It is as if God implanted in human beings a radio receiver that He Himself tuned to the signal sent by creation. The message is not only sent; it is received! The very universality of religion and man’s belief in a god or gods is clear evidence that Paul’s insight is accurate and true.

But Paul has more to say about man’s reaction to nature’s message from God. While what may be known about God through natural revelation is plain, human beings “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v. 18). Paul writes that “although they knew God, they did not glorify God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (vv. 21–23).

The knowledge of God available to human beings from the beginning was rejected, suppressed, and corrupted. The word “god” was drained of its original meaning and perverted by humankind. And the “gods” of various peoples and places were not invented in a pious search *for* Him, but rather in a desperate attempt to escape *from* Him.

THEORIES ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION

As it became more and more clear that religion is a universal phenomenon, students of comparative religion began to offer suggestions about where religion came from. Typical theories held today include the Animistic Theory, the Nature Worship theory, and what has been called the Original Monotheism theory.

The Animistic Theory. This theory was promoted in the book *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871 by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor. Tylor argued that primitive peoples had trouble distinguishing



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dreams and reality, and that their dreams about the dead led them to believe in spirits that exist after death. They extended this belief in spirits to a belief that animals, trees, and rocks possessed spirits too. As these spirits could be helpful or harmful, primitive peoples attempted to appease the harmful spirits and appeal to the beneficial. Out of this belief in spirits grew the multiple deities that characterize the more sophisticated religions found in the ancient world.

The Nature Worship Theory. Max Muller, who taught at Oxford in the 1880s, studied mythology and Indian religions. He suggested that human beings developed their religions by observing the forces of nature. To interact with the forces of nature, primitive peoples personalized them, giving names to the sun, the moon, storms, and so on. The stories [myths] that were invented to explain how these forces operate gradually developed into pantheons of deities, around whom religions developed.

The Original Monotheism Theory. It wasn't until the beginning of the twentieth century that a Jesuit priest entered the discussion with the proposal that the world's religions were corruptions of an original monotheism. He did not base his argument on Scripture, but on the observation that even in the most primitive areas in Africa or Australia, where religion was animistic or polytheistic, there was a persistent belief that once there was a single great god above all. While this god had lost contact with the world, or the world had lost contact with him, the belief that he existed was pervasive. The priest, Father Wilhelm Schmidt, argued that the later monotheistic religions had simply recovered the original belief of humankind. Father Schmidt's view was rejected out of hand, for an evolutionary assumption underlay the research of the scholars working in the field of comparative religion.

The Biblical Theory. The biblical theory of the origin of religions is clearly expressed by the apostle Paul, as discussed briefly earlier. In the beginning, God created the material universe and the first human beings. But Adam and Eve fell, and in introducing sin into our race corrupted every gift God had given human beings. Mind, heart, and will were twisted in the Fall, and the bond of love and obedience that had united God and man was broken.

While God did not abandon human beings, human beings abandoned Him. Yet human beings retained an innate awareness of the reality of the spiritual world. Knowledge of God might be suppressed, but the need for God could not be. So as generation succeeded generation, over the centuries and millenniums, human beings remained "religious animals." But strikingly, *humanity's religions reveal a drive not to find God but to distance themselves from Him.* A/DA

RELIGION AS A WAY OF DISTANCING FROM GOD

Data from all over the world suggests that human beings retain knowledge of God but have persistently sought to distance themselves from Him. This distancing takes several forms. One strategy is reflected in stories of a High God who is uninterested in His creation. God's existence is acknowledged, but He has become irrelevant.

Another strategy subordinates deities by assuming that the gods were themselves created. Typically the many gods in such systems are organized in hierarchies, and humankind is to deal with the lesser gods.

A very common strategy for distancing from God is to envision deities in man's image. The basic strategy of eastern religions is to depersonalize Him.



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Perhaps the most significant strategy for distancing from God is seen in the religions of the ancient Middle East, the culture within which the Old Testament revelation was given. Let's look at these strategies and how they have been used.

The first strategy: make God irrelevant. The literature on comparative religions contains many accounts of a high deity who has withdrawn. *The Eerdmans' Handbook of the World's Religions* notes the following:

Many primal religions have a single supreme god above all other powers. Sometimes he is even thought of as a universal god for all peoples. For instance, North American Indians think of the Great Spirit, and the New Zealand Maoris of Io. This God is usually the creator of all things. Sometimes he is concerned that people live moral lives, and deals with them through the lesser gods. At other times he is believed to have been angry with mankind and to have withdrawn from the world, or else he is so high and mysterious that we cannot possibly reach him (p. 131).

In *Religions of the World*, Hopfe, writing about basic concepts in African religions, identifies a belief that above all local deities there is one supreme High God who created the world and then withdrew from active participation in it.... Although most of the native religions of Africa are basically polytheistic in their day-to-day practice, there is an overriding belief that beyond all the minor gods, spirits, and ancestors, one High God exists (p. 27).

In volume 2 of Mircea Eliade's *History of Religious Ideas* the author notes the same phenomenon in Bronze Age China. The cult of the supreme celestial god, Ti, "shows a certain diminution of religious primacy. Ti is found to be distant and less active than the ancestors of the royal lineage" (pp. 7, 8).

In volume 3 Eliade quotes Helmond's study of the Slavic peoples. There Helmond notes that "Slavs do not dispute the existence of one god in the heavens, but consider that this god concerned himself only with celestial affairs, having abandoned the government of the world to inferior divinities whom he has procreated himself" (p. 30).

Robert S. Ellwood Jr., in *Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, states,

It is characteristic of many peoples to believe that the supreme god who created the earth is remote from our affairs, and that it is really the finite but far more involved ancestral or nature spirits with whom we have the most to deal. The Luguru of East Africa, for example, say that the earth was made by the high god Mulungu, but he is not normally concerned with human affairs. He is given no prayers or sacrifices; they are made rather to the *mitsimu*, or ancestral spirits.

In these and many other instances the existence of a supreme god is acknowledged, but *he becomes less and less relevant to the lives of ordinary people*. Whether he is angry with humankind and withdraws, or simply loses interest in his creation and wanders off, the high god becomes irrelevant to religion and to daily life. In Paul's words, "although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful" (Rom. 1:21). Knowledge of God has been suppressed by casting Him as more and more distant from the world He made.

The second strategy: subordinate "God." Many ancient religions present a variety of gods and goddesses. In Mesopotamia these deities were supposed to have been formed in a watery mass that preexisted the universe, and thus are subordinate beings. Eliade (Vol. 1, p. 88) notes the following:

Like so many other traditions, the Egyptian cosmogony begins with the emergence of a mound in the primordial waters. The appearance of this "First Place" above the aquatic



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immensity signifies the emergence of the earth, but also the beginning of light, life, and consciousness (p. 58).

The Eerdman's handbook adds, "Different gods were thought to have somehow emerged from the hill or the water, and in various ways to have created other gods" (p. 87).

The Eerdman's handbook describes a similar belief held by the Aztecs of Central America.

The Aztecs believed that two primordial beings originated everything, including the gods. They were Ometecuhtli, 'Lord of Duality,' and Omeciuatl, 'Lady of the Duality.' They lived at the summit of the world in the thirteenth heaven. These two produced all the gods and also all mankind (p. 89).

These belief systems subordinate even the most powerful of the gods by making them creations emerging from preexisting matter, while the hierarchies of deities are an additional attempt to gain distance from the source of reality. The handbook adds that "by the time of the Spanish Conquest, the two primordial beings had largely been pushed into the background by a crowd of younger and more active gods."

EVOLUTION AS RELIGION

It is significant to note that the theory of evolution, which most people today unquestioningly accept, is essentially a religion. It utilizes a familiar strategy for distancing from God. Like the religions of the ancient Middle East, of Egypt, and of Greece, evolution assumes that the material universe always existed. While the ancients imagined that deities sprang from pre-existing matter to give the world its present shape, the evolutionist assumes that impersonal laws of nature and chance combined to spontaneously create life from non-living matter. The ancients sensed the reality of a spiritual realm, but peopled that reality with gods of their own invention. Moderns deny the existence of a spiritual realm, and stridently insist that what can be touched and tested is all there ever was. But the distancing strategy adopted by the superstitious priest of Mesopotamia 3,000 years before Christ and by the rationalist scientist of America 2,000 years after Christ is essentially the same. Both, by asserting the priority of the material universe, rule out *a priori* the God of Creation. Both make God subordinate to the material universe, and so deny their obligation to glorify Him or be thankful.

The third strategy: make gods in man's image. Most educated people are somewhat familiar with the pantheons of Greece and Rome. Here Zeus is held up as the father of the gods, in a literal sense. The mythology recorded in the works of Homer and others describes relationships between the gods in human family terms, with husbands and wives and offspring. While the gods are more powerful than human beings, their motives and passions, their lies and sexual liaisons, reflect what is worst in human society. While the gods may take an interest in human affairs, their interest is fleeting and their advocacy undependable, for feuds and intrigues within the family of the gods makes human beings vulnerable to becoming pawns in games played only for the deities' benefit. Moreover, these deities created in man's image are far from all-powerful. They, like human beings, are subject to fate and destiny, and they too came into existence after the material universe.

Later pagan philosophers, who expressed the opinion that there must be one god underlying reality, criticized the religion of Greece and Rome. But as one of the critics, Maximus of Tyre, wrote,



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God, the Father and Demiurge of what exists, older than the sun, older than the heavens, superior to time and the age of every transient nature, is anonymous for any legislator and ineffable to voice and invisible to the eyes. We have no means of ascertaining his nature (Oration 2).

It was as Paul described. Some cultures “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man” (Rom. 1:23). In the process such cultures so perverted their knowledge of God that those who realized He must exist had no notion of how to find Him.

The fourth strategy: depersonalize God. Yet another strategy for distancing from God is seen in beliefs rooted in the Far East. There the very personality of God is denied, and several religions hold that whatever the ultimate reality may be, it cannot be comprehended by human beings.

In describing Taoism, a religion originating in China, Eliade (Vol. 2, p. 29) asserts that the Tao is “the ultimate, mysterious, and inapprehensible reality, *fons et origo* of all creation, foundation of all existence.” Even a second Tao, contingent on the first, cannot be apprehended. Lao Tzu says, “I gaze and I see nothing.... I listen and I hear nothing.... I find only an undifferentiated Unity.... Indiscernible, it cannot be named” (ch. 14).

A classic expression of the nature of “god” is found in this stanza from the 25th chapter of *Tao Te Ching*:

There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,
Which existed before heaven and earth.
Soundless and formless, it depends on
nothing and does not change,
It operates everywhere and is free from
danger.
It may be considered the mother of the
universe.

I do not know its name; I call it Tao.

In Hinduism the name given the “something,” the unknowable Absolute, is the Brahman. Ward J. Fellows in *Religions East and West* notes that the Brahman “is one, is many, is personal, is impersonal, is everything, is nothing, is red, is green, is good, is bad, is the world, is emptiness” (p. 92).

Fellows adds, “The idea of an impersonal ultimate Being which is the source of becoming, or of the unchanging which remains when all else changes, is not peculiar to India, but the root idea has been more fully elaborated, and then incorporated more centrally, in philosophic Hinduism than anywhere else” (p. 93).

But here Hinduism goes even further. The doctrine of the Atman affirms that the human soul and the Brahman are fundamentally the same. Rather than see human beings as separate from and subordinate to God, the Hindu sees himself or herself as one with “god” and thus as “god” or as a part of “god.”

It is especially striking to realize that in the practice of Hinduism there are many gods and goddesses who are not “god” in any biblical sense, yet are worshiped, prayed to, and relied on by the people. That the many gods and goddesses of the Hindu might co-exist with a philosophical system that utterly depersonalizes the true God is logically contradictory. Yet the notion that “gods” exist while the Brahman [“god”] is everything and nothing, unknown and



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unknowable but essentially part of ourselves, is a foundational feature of Eastern religions. Clearly this strategy for distancing from God has successfully entrapped untold millions, from China through India and Tibet.

The fifth strategy: emasculate “God.” Old Testament faith originated in the ancient Middle East, often called the cradle of civilization. Written records there go back some 3,000 years before Christ, and it is from this part of the world that we have our first written accounts of religion. It is especially fascinating to see how the peoples of Canaan developed a strategy for distancing themselves from the primary deity, whom they called El (“god”).

In Syria-Palestine, El was the head of a pantheon of deities. His name simply meant “god” in the Semitic languages of the area. In the west, he was viewed as a personal God, and called “Powerful,” the “Father of Gods and Men,” and “King.” According to myth, El formed the female, Asherah or Ashtoreth, and the two produced seventy divine sons.

However, despite El’s primacy, he is increasingly depicted in myths as “physically weak, indecisive, senile, resigned” (Eliade, Vol. 1, p. 151). Gradually he is replaced by Baal, a fourth generation deity. According to a rather mutilated text, Baal and some confederates attacked El in his palace on Mount Sapan. They wounded El, tied him up, and castrated him. In the ancient East this mutilation excluded a person from sovereignty. Baal then carried off El’s wife. She became his consort, and as the Old Testament records, was worshiped with him by the Canaanites. El was forced to seek refuge at the end of the world.

While the myths suggest that El begged the help of his family and promised to make the god Yam his successor if he would drive Baal from the throne, El himself could now be dismissed. He had *literally* become an impotent deity!

What do we learn from this survey of salient elements of religions around the world? First, we see that human beings truly are “religious.” Wherever human society is found, religion is a significant element. Second, we find clear evidence that religion cannot be characterized as a “search for god or gods.” Features of all religions suggest that they “*devolved*,” gradually withdrawing from original assumptions about the deity. Third, we find compelling evidence that the world’s religions in essence are mechanisms for distancing human beings *from* God. Many of man’s religions typically reveal an original knowledge of God, which has been actively suppressed and corrupted!

In this we see unmistakable evidence of the accuracy of Paul’s account of fallen humanity’s decline:

Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.... [They] exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 1:21–23, 25).

THE CREATOR

Paul states it clearly. The central truth about God, a truth that has been continuously available to humankind, is that the word “God” can rightly be applied only to the Creator.



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The Creator and natural revelation. While God Himself is invisible, and not accessible to our senses, the creation testifies to what Paul calls God’s “eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20). This witness to God in the creation is often referred to as “natural revelation.” What Paul is saying is that “what may be known of God” (v. 19)—His eternal power and Godhead—is both broadcast in nature and is intuitively grasped by human beings.

The first phrase, “eternal power” (v. 20), indicates that both God and His power are eternal. The material universe is not self-existent; its existence is dependent on the exercise of God’s power. Paul’s choice of the Greek word *aidios* (which means “everlasting”) here rather than the more common term *aionios* (which means “eternal”) **indicates that God’s power is also continuously at work in maintaining the universe.** God brought the world into being, and the operations of what we sometimes call “natural laws” are in fact dependent on the continuous exercise of God’s power.

The Greek word translated “Godhead” (v. 20; or in many other English versions, “deity” or “divine nature”) is *theotes*. F. B. Meyers suggests that this term encompasses all the perfections of God. Rather than present a single quality, *theotes* indicates “the totality of that which God is as a being possessed of divine attributes.” While the evidence available in the creation is not sufficient to reveal God’s love and grace, it is more than enough to make it plain that a Being who is both Powerful and Personal is the source of all. It is this Person and this Person only who is “God.”

A common argument for the existence of God illustrates this truth. An individual walking through a field finds a pocket watch. He picks it up, looks at it, and immediately realizes that this object didn’t just happen, as might an outcropping of rock. The watch is too complex. The outside of the watch is polished metal. It has a glass face that seems intended to protect hands that move in a regular, consistent way. And there are numbers painted on the face of the watch to which the moving hands point. Within the watch are complex gears that seem designed to maintain the regular movement of the hands.

Upon further reflection, the finder realizes that the features of the watch that he has noted are interrelated. The removal of any one element would make it impossible for the rest to function as intended. No one finding such a watch would assume for an instant that it “just happened.” Both the intuitive and the logical conclusion is that the watch had a maker, and that the maker was personal, intelligent, skilled, and had *designed* it.

And so, the argument insists, when we look at the creation we simply *must* assume a Creator. Creation is too complex to have simply just happened. The design of the universe—the multiple systems that keep our planet livable, each of them marked by interrelated mechanisms that must operate in concert—are far more complex than those of the watch. There simply must be a personal God to explain the existence of the material universe.

And what can we determine about this God? We know He existed before that which He made; He must predate His creation. We know He is a personal Being, for the design of the universe and its details shows intelligence and purpose. He clearly is great and powerful. He is intelligent, inventive, and imaginative. The final product even suggests that He is benevolent, for what He has designed sustains and enriches the experiences of living creatures. Yes, indeed. The invisible things of God, His “eternal power and *theotes*” are “clearly seen” in the things that are made (v. 20).



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It is this that makes humankind’s response to God so wrong. The appropriate response to a God who presents Himself to us as Creator is to glorify Him and be thankful. But rather than give God credit and worship Him, human beings suppress the truth about God in unrighteousness. Fallen human beings create religions in the name of God, which in reality serve to distance themselves from the Creator God and to deny Him His honor! In taking this course, human beings suppressed and distorted an original knowledge of God that went beyond even that available to all “since the creation of the world” (v. 20).

As the design of a watch testifies to the existence of a watchmaker, so the complex harmony of the universe demonstrates the existence of the Creator.



Original Knowledge of the Creator. Paul’s argument from natural revelation makes it clear that God continuously makes Himself known to human beings of every time and place. Psalm 19:1–4, quoted earlier, states this truth very clearly:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.

But we need to remember that in the beginning our race had a much more pure, much more complete knowledge of God. That knowledge is reflected in the Genesis 1–3 account of Creation. God, who made the universe and shaped earth as a home for humankind, stooped to fashion the first man. God breathed into Adam’s body the breath of life, so sharing His own image-likeness.



BIBLE BACKGROUND:
THE IMAGE-LIKENESS OF GOD

Who are we? To some we are simply animals, evolved from single-cell ancestors. To others we are merely fallen creatures, with sinfulness being man’s defining characteristic. But to the psalmist we are the focus of God’s concern, “crowned... with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). The biblical view of humankind reflects the confidence that, with all our failings, we are special. We bear the “image” and “likeness” of God (Gen. 1:26). This is the place we must begin to understand the nature of humankind. The *Nelson Illustrated Bible Handbook* notes the following:

This phrase, “image and likeness,” is best understood as a statement about personhood. We share with God capacities that only persons possess; we think, we feel, we value, we choose. It is because we are, like God, persons, that we have the capacity for fellowship with God and for meaningful relationships with each other.

Many have been troubled by man’s capacity for hatred, brutality, and crime. Certainly sin has twisted us. But sin has not robbed us of personhood, or of the potential for fellowship with God. It is in the Bible’s revelation of our origin in God’s gift of



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personhood that we grasp the source of our capacity for love, self-sacrifice, appreciation for truth and beauty, creativity, worship, and moral sensibility. The good in humankind is adequately explained only by our origin at God's own hand.

The Bible, like our newspapers, testifies to the damage sin does in human experience. We carry God's likeness imperfectly. But the basic fact is that we human beings have the potential for restoration. God's image has not been eradicated (cf. Gen. 9; James 3:9). We are created in the image of God, and thus have infinite worth and value. Our respect for others, our acceptance of ourselves, and our sense of the worth of every individual, rest on this foundation (pp. 30, 31).



God placed Adam in a garden designed to give Adam every opportunity to use the copious gifts the Lord had bestowed in creating Adam in His own image-likeness. When Adam finally came to realize that his very nature required a companion who shared the image-likeness, God formed Eve. For an unknown time Adam and Eve lived together in Eden, often visited by God in the "cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8).

Even after Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin warped and twisted the gifts God had given, God sought the first pair out. He came to them, not to punish, but to promise. In history's first sacrifice God clothed Adam and Eve in animal skins, and spoke about an offspring who would one day put down evil and restore humankind (vv. 9–21). Adam and Eve and their descendants have lived with the consequences of that initial rebellion against God, but throughout history God's pursuit of human beings has been intended to recapture human hearts and restore them to an intimate, loving relationship with Him (Rom. 5:12–21).

Humanity's original knowledge of God was far more complete than the knowledge of God available through natural revelation. God was known not only as Creator but also as friend. He was known not only intellectually but also personally, experienced and enjoyed face to face. And even in sin God was experienced as a person whose love and grace were available to forgive and to restore.

Yet as generation succeeded generation, this truth about God too was suppressed. As sin tightened its grip on the human heart, the God of creation seemed more threatening to a spiritually blinded humanity. Tradition bundled truth and falsehood, then spun it to give human beings greater distance from the God they did not wish to know. The "high God" of racial memory was pushed into the background, as stories about His indifference or anger were invented to explain why He might be safely ignored.

In the Scripture, God's reliable and relevant Word, He has revealed the truth that humankind suppressed.



Paul's explanation of man's spiritual and moral condition, developed in Romans 1, conveys both existential and historic truth. Existentially human beings of each generation suppress truth about God readily available through the creation. Historically human beings gradually suppressed and twisted the original knowledge of God transmitted as tradition from Adam and Eve to succeeding generations. In the process, the word "god" lost its meaning, and new and



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different notions were incorporated in a desperate effort to gain distance from the Creator, the one and the only true God.

RECOVERING GOD

What I've suggested so far is both simple and profound. Following the apostle Paul's teaching in Romans 1, I've argued that humankind's religions represent an effort to distance people from God. Religion does not function as a search for god or gods, but rather as a mechanism to suppress the knowledge of the true God available through creation and in the most ancient of traditions.

Religion adopts different strategies to distance people from God, **but each of them involves redefining "god."** Attributes and functions of deity are ascribed to someone, to many, or to some thing other than the Creator. In the process the meaning of the word "god" is radically altered, and human beings thus "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (v. 18).

This presents a challenge for us. How do we recover the suppressed truth? How do we come to know God as He truly is? One answer is that we study the names and titles of God as revealed to us in Scripture. If we are to fill the term "God" with its true meaning, there is no better way than to trace in Scripture those words and phrases the Holy Spirit uses to identify and to describe the Lord!

We begin, of course, as Paul and all of Scripture begins, with the fact that the God about whom Scripture speaks is the Creator. Then we go on to look into Scripture and there to learn all we can about Him. We learn about Him from His names. We learn about Him from His titles. We learn about Him from similes and metaphors. And as we learn, a wonderful thing happens. As man's religions have distanced us from God by distorting our notions of who He is, so *revelation draws us closer to Him by helping us see Him more clearly.*

The more clearly we see God—the sharper and more vivid our grasp of who He is—the more wonderful He appears. As each name and title adds fresh dimensions of understanding, our hearts respond and we find ourselves praising and glorifying Him. And we find ourselves utterly thankful—not simply for His gifts, but also for Him.⁸

⁸ Richards, L. (2001). [Every name of God in the Bible](#) (pp. 3–14). Thomas Nelson.



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