



God's Attributes

If someone asked you about God's characteristics, could you provide a biblical description of God and how His attributes impact your life? If you could, then this study can be a worshipful review of what God has done and continues to accomplish in your life. On the other hand, if you infrequently think of God or are basically unaware of Who He is, this overview is for you.

If you need an introduction to God, you are not alone. The majority of people in the world do not believe in the God of the Bible. Surprisingly, some believers in Christ also have shallow, distorted views of God. Yet, knowing God is the very essence of eternal life.

John 17:3, And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

1 John 5:20, And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

In fact, knowing God provides a foundation for expressing His love to others and for intimate fellowship with Jesus.

John 17:26, (*Jesus praying*) I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Knowing Christ should be a top priority for every committed believer in Jesus, as the Apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians chapter 3.

Philippians 3:8-10, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Over a century ago, Charles Spurgeon said:

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go on our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that I am but of yesterday and know nothing.^A

A.W. Tozer said in *The Knowledge of the Holy* that there was a desperate need for the church to revise its concept of God in light of its distorted conception of Him. He went on to say, "The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him."^B

To illustrate Spurgeon's and Tozer's concerns, consider the prayer, "God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food." We understand the concept of *food* and, at some level, understand the meaning of *good*. But what about our understanding of *God is great*? God's greatness is truly beyond comprehension, a fact emphasized in the book *Incomparable – Explorations in the Character of God*, by Andrew Wilson.^C

We need to be slapped in the face with the greatness of Yahweh. Human problems will never be solved by economics, or politics, or science, or self-help, but only by a renewed understanding of the wonder and glory and majesty of Almighty God. I remember the first time I read Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy*, and this truth hit me right between the eyes: "It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God ... is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity ... The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him."

Sin results from knowing God but not responding appropriately to his greatness (Romans 1:21). So every person suffers from a sickness for which an understanding of the greatness of God is the only medicine.

If we agree with Tozer's assessment of our problem, and I do, then we need Isaiah 40. We need it because it presents

a God so great that our response to him can only be worship and amazement. Isaiah deliberately presents a series of rhetorical questions designed to bring out the sheer bigness of God, by taking massive earthly things – the seas, the skies, the land, and the mountains – and making them seem almost ridiculously small in comparison to God.

Isaiah 40:12-13, Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has measured the Spirit of Yahweh, or what man shows him counsel?

Let's look at them one at a time. The first question is, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?" If you cup your hand now, you will see how small the hollow of your hand is. Depending on your size, you will be able to hold up to about one hundred milliliters of water in it. Now consider: How big would you have to be to hold all the world's water in the hollow of your hand? Every day, the world experiences forty-five thousand thunderstorms. If you look at the earth from space, you can see them, flashing around all over the place. Each thundercloud in each one of these thunderstorms contains, on average, one hundred thousand tons of water. And that's just the clouds. The four Great Lakes, if they were poured out over the continental United States, would cover the whole country, two and a half yards deep. The oceans, more dramatically, contain around 328 million *cubic miles* of water. And Isaiah pictures Yahweh as measuring all of them in the hollow of his hand.

Now, instead of cupping your hand, stretch it out to form a handspan. My hand span is about the same size as a banana. God's is big enough to "mark off the heavens." Our minds are simply unable to grasp this, because the heavens are so big, but a couple of illustrations may help. If the 93 million miles from here to the sun were represented by the thickness of one piece of paper, it would take a stack 25 yards high to reach from earth to the *nearest* star. And there are so many stars that if you were to count the ones in our galaxy alone, at the rate of three per second, 24 hours a day, it would take you a millennium. Counting all the stars in the universe would take slightly longer: one hundred trillion years. Yet Yahweh is so great that his hand span is easily big enough to mark off all of them.

God also encloses the dust of the earth in a measure and weighs the mountains and the hills. We are probably a bit more able to cope with this mentally, but it is still mind-bending. Imagine fitting the Sahara desert into your measuring jug, or sizing up the Himalayas on your bathroom scales! Even today, climbing Mt. Everest is a pinnacle of human achievement; it is so high and so hostile that a hundred and eighty people have died trying and most of us have no way of getting hold of how big it actually is. Yet Yahweh "weighs the mountains."

So we have a God who is so great that the very biggest things we know about – the earth, the mountains, the oceans, and the skies themselves – are small enough to fit in his hands and be weighed in his balances. Who, Isaiah therefore asks, can fathom the Spirit of Yahweh, or dare to advise God?

We need revelation of the greatness of this God. In a world where there are no shortages of people lining up to advise God on how to do his job, reflecting on the great Yahweh described in Isaiah 40 will burst our bubbles and bring us from our high horses to our knees. If we have a picture of Yahweh's greatness in our souls, we will not argue with him or apologize for him, but will wonder at him and worship him. How great is our God!

Our great God is beyond comprehension, yet He is not impersonal. He has revealed some of His characteristics to all of mankind, as the New Testament book of Romans states.

Romans 1:18-25, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Throughout the Bible, God's attributes are mentioned by name and seen through their manifestations. The following verses highlight many of God's attributes, but these characteristics and associated Scripture references are not an exhaustive list. Note that some attributes of God are mentioned in association with other divine characteristics.

- **God is Eternal** . . . *He has always existed and will continue to be forever*

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

Psalm 90:2, Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Romans 16:25-26, Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—

1 Timothy 1:17, To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

- **God is Faithful . . . He is true and trustworthy**

Psalm 100:5, For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 115:1, Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

- **God is Forgiving . . . He has sacrificial love that cancels a debt (sin)**

Psalm 86:5, For you, O LORD, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

Ephesians 4:32, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

- **God is Good . . . He is benevolent and morally virtuous**

Psalm 25:8, Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

Nahum 1:7, The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

- **God is Gracious . . . He is the giver of unmerited blessings, even to those who are undeserving**

Psalm 116:5, Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.

Romans 3:23-24, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

- **God is Holy . . . He is absolutely perfect and completely distinct from all else**

Isaiah 6:3b, . . . Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

Revelation 15:3b-4, . . . Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.

- **God is Immutable . . . He is unchangeable**

Malachi 3:6, For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

James 1:17, Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

- **God is Jealous . . . He carefully maintains and protects what is rightly His for the betterment of others**

Exodus 34:14, for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God

Deuteronomy 4:24, For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God

- **God is Just . . . He is morally right and accurate in all actions and decisions**

Deuteronomy 32:3-4, For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God!⁴ The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

1 Peter 1:17-19, And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

- **God is Light . . . He is completely pure, absolutely sinless, and the source of all truth**

1 John 1:5, This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

- **God is Love . . . He is infinitely compassionate and acts sacrificially for others' well-being**
1 John 4:8, 16, Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love . . . So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
- **God is Merciful . . . He does not give us what we deserve but, instead, grants favor and lovingkindness**
Psalm 86:15, But you, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
Lamentations 3:22-23, The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
- **God is Omnipotent . . . He has unlimited power and is able to accomplish anything He chooses**
Psalm 135:6, Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.
Jeremiah 32:17, Ah, LORD GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.
Luke 1:37, For nothing will be impossible with God.
- **God is Omnipresent . . . He is present in all places at all times**
Psalm 139:7-12, Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night, ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.
Jeremiah 23:23-24, Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.
- **God is Omniscient . . . He knows everything – past, present, and future**
Psalm 147:5, Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.
Romans 11:33, Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
- **God is Righteous . . . He is virtuous, upright, and perfect in every way, fulfilling promises and exercising justice and rewards**
Psalm 145:17, The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.
Isaiah 45:21-22, Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. ²² Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.
- **God is Self-Existent . . . He is eternally alive and independent**
Psalm 90:1-2, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
John 5:26, For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.
- **God is Sovereign . . . He has absolute and universal supremacy**
1 Chronicles 29:11, Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.
Psalm 115:3, Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.
1 Timothy 6:13-15, I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords
- **God is Spirit . . . His essence is immaterial and invisible**
John 4:24, God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

- **God is Transcendent** . . . *He is far greater than the limits of experience, knowledge, and the universe*
Psalm 113:5-6, Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high,⁶ who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?
Isaiah 55:8-9, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- **God is Truth** . . . *He is reliable and without error of any kind*
Isaiah 65:16a, So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth . . .
- **God is Wise** . . . *He has sound judgment and infinite knowledge that provides the basis to fulfill all plans for His glory*
Romans 16:25-27, Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.
1 Corinthians 1:21-25, For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

As you read the Bible, you will note the many attributes of God Almighty. As some of the above verses indicate, sometimes only one attribute is mentioned in a verse. At other times, multiple attributes are referenced in a verse or two. Note the many divine attributes listed in the passages below.

Exodus 34:6-7, The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

1 Chronicles 29:11-12, Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.¹² Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

The majestic spectrum of God’s attributes and their applications is beyond our full comprehension. However, as a result of believing in Christ and, subsequently, becoming more Christ-like by loving God, loving others, and living in obedience to God’s Word, you will grow in the knowledge of God and become more appreciative of His attributes. As a result, you will have continual opportunities to give thanks and praise to the Lord God Almighty for Who He is and what He continues to accomplish throughout the world, in the Body of Christ, in the lives of others, and in your life.

2 Peter 1:2-8, May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Footnotes

- A. Sermon on Malachi 3:6, by C. H. Spurgeon, as cited in Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 80
- B. The Knowledge of the Holy, A.W. Tozer (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961, p. 12)
- C. INCOMPARABLE, published by David C. Cook, 4050 Lee Vance View, Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A. First edition of INCOMPARABLE published by Survivor, an imprint of Kingsway Communications, © 2007 Andrew Wilson, ISBN 978-184291-281-2.