

# DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

September 17 – 21, 2007



September 17, 2007

## “God...Is!”

From the outset it is a struggle to define just what ‘God’ *is*.

Philosophers have sometimes spoken of ‘god’ as that which is and always has been. Titles such as ‘Unmoved Mover’, ‘First Cause’, ‘Prime Mover’ all express the notion that ‘God’ is the one who existed before and apart from the rest of the universe. ‘God’ is the force or being who, as it were, set up the dominoes and knocked the first one over – causing the universe as we know it to come into existence.

In Ex. 3:14 the God of Israel boldly lays claim to these titles: *“God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”* The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the self-existent One. An outrageous claim – unless true!

Jesus, who was in the beginning and through whom all things exist<sup>2</sup>, made a similar claim about himself: *“I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!”<sup>3</sup>* His hearers were outraged. In one sentence Jesus identified himself to the Jews as ‘Yahweh’ and to the Greeks as the Self-Existent-One whom their philosophers had sought to define.<sup>4</sup> An outrageous claim – unless true!

If we are seeking reality, purpose, answers to some of the great questions of life... - here is the starting point: God...***IS!***

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<sup>1</sup> Usually transliterated from Hebrew as ‘Yahweh’ or ‘Jehovah’

<sup>2</sup> John 1:1-4

<sup>3</sup> John 8:58

<sup>4</sup> See Paul’s observations on this in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

September 18, 2007

## “God is Spirit”

In conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus stated that *‘God is Spirit’*<sup>1</sup>. In context, he seems to be affirming that God is not bound to our physical places or outward practices of worship because he is ‘more than’ or ‘other than’ a being bound in time and space, as we are.

The mysteriousness of God’s ‘essence’ may simply reflect a humbling reality: it is beyond our comprehension. Just as it is impossible to run a modern media program in a old Commodore 64 computer, the ‘data’ regarding God’s essence simply cannot be processed by our human minds.

But God does do two things...

He gives us the glorious privilege of being bearers of his ‘spirit’. When we are ‘born again’, we are ‘born of the Spirit’<sup>2</sup>. Some of the ‘essence of God’ is planted in our lives as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. And God desires that spiritual nature to be nourished so that it may grow and change us.

Secondly, God reveals himself to us in his actions, names, attributes, etc. In the Mideast, a name was seen as an expression of the nature of the thing designated. Names and attributes of God are given by God himself to disclose a measure of the Divine Being. While we cannot put them all together like a jigsaw puzzle and declare, ‘This is God!’, they do they give more than enough data for our minds to ‘crunch’. We certainly have all the insight that we require to love, worship and serve<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:24 (TNIV) or ‘a Spirit’

<sup>2</sup> John 3; Colossians 1:27

<sup>3</sup> “They are merely toying with frigid speculations whose mind is set on the question of what God is, when what it really concerns us to know is rather what kind of person He is and what is appropriate to His nature.”  
John Calvin, *Institutes* I.2.2.

The most simple name by which God is designated in the Old Testament is 'El' or 'Lord'. Most likely derived from 'alah' ('smitten with fear'), it points to the God of Creation and nature as worthy of fear or reverence because he is strong and mighty. 'Elyon', a poetic form, further identifies God as the high and exalted one. It should be noted that 'el' is not really a proper name for God since it is also used of idols, ordinary men and rulers.

However, in reference to God, this word is most often found in the plural form, 'Elohim'. In English Bibles this is translated as 'Lord', and commentators take great pains to explain why the one true God has a plural name. Some allude to a 'royal we'. Others speak of the plural form as being 'intensive', indicating a fullness of power. Some of us see in this 'plural-singular' an indicator of the Trinity: that God is both one and three at the same time. *"Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness,...'"*<sup>1</sup>

In any case, while very common, the word is a perpetual reminder that God should provoke a response of fear, deep respect or 'numinous awe' on the part of human beings. His name should not be used simply to emphasize strong feeling (as in 'O my God!'). He is Lord of all and therefore worthy of our respect and reverence.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:26

September 20, 2007

## **'Adonai'**

'Adonai' derives from words have to do with judgment and rule. It points to God as the almighty Ruler of the Universe, to whom all things are subject and to whom we relate as servants. Like *Elohim*, it describes the transcendence of God – that God is high and exalted and above us.

In the earlier times, *Adonai* was the usual name by which the people of Israel addressed God. Later on, it was largely supplanted by the name '*Yahweh*'. The latter was seen as more uniquely identifying the God of Israel and emphasizing them as His special, covenant People. It *perhaps* made them feel more 'special' and God more 'user-friendly' than *Adonai*.

Balance or 'wholeness' in our perception of God is something we need to strive towards. It can be tempting to focus on God's love and grace rather than his holiness and judgment. It is also more attractive to be a 'child' of God than a 'servant' of God, which is perhaps why the New Testament stresses the latter identity so much more.

Our God truly is the Ruler and Judge of all the universe. By his very nature he is worthy of our respect, worship, reverence, service. Christ is Saviour, but also our Lord. It is good for us to remember this in our patterns of prayer and in how we think about God. It may help to better appreciate how God is working in the world and in our lives. It may help us to live more consistently in the centre of God's will.

September 21      **'El-Shaddai' – God Almighty**

'*El-Shaddai*' is related in meaning to words that have to do with power, authority and might. It points to God as possessing all power in heaven and on earth. However, it differs slightly from '*Elohim*' in that it contemplates God as subjecting all the powers of nature and making them subject to divine grace.<sup>1</sup>

So while it stresses the power of God, '*El-Shaddai*' does not evoke fear or terror as much as awe that we have been chose to be the objects of God's attention and gracious action. It instills courage, vision confidence and comfort.

*"May **God Almighty** [ Hebrew *El-Shaddai*] bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples."*<sup>2</sup>

God is indeed mighty and powerful, but this power is for us, not against us. He watches over the affairs of peoples and nations so as to providentially "*work all things together for the good for of those who love him.*"<sup>3</sup> He is the One who is mindful of Mary in her humble condition and who works though her in power to bless the nations!<sup>4</sup>

While few of us will have the impact on human history of Abraham or Mary, the same Almighty God watches over our lives, guides our destinies and desires to work in and through us to accomplish his Kingdom purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 49

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 28:3 (TNIV)

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:28 (TNIV)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:49