

Who and What Is God? - Part 2

In Part One I addressed the subject of *who and what is God*. It has become a contentious subject over a period of time. Clearly, in one sermon, one cannot cover all the essential elements of this particular subject. So, I would like to take another sermon today to bring some matters to conclusion and to help put this into its right context for us.

Let's summarise what we went through last time. We started with Paul's comments to the Romans about what could be known of God was able to be known from the creation. In light of Paul's statement, we went to Genesis 1:1. We encountered what people considered were problems, problems that created difficulties for them to understand in light of the way in which they approached God's word.

I pointed out at that time that much of the study of God's word, especially on the nature of God, was controlled and influenced by what is called metaphysics. Metaphysics originally derived from Aristotle and has been developed since that period of time. It literally controls and influences the whole aspect of the study of God.

We spent a few moments looking at one of the essential ingredients of metaphysics, showing how each and every one of us can prove from the Bible that it is wrong - because the Bible clearly shows that spirit is divisible. There are different forms of spirit in this world, and not just one homogeneous spirit that metaphysics demands.

We also had a look at another concept which was based upon metaphysics: that of monotheism. We came to see very clearly even from the Jewish writers, that the concept of monotheism in relationship to the Jews prior to or up until the time of Christ was a very different concept than that which the Greeks held to, and which is normally used when people refer to monotheism today; when the focus is upon the *mono* as opposed to the focus by the Jews on the *theos*, upon *the God*. They focused upon a *supreme God* not just upon *one God*.

We looked at a very telling comment from the Encyclopaedia Judaica about what Paul said in Romans 1:19-20. It talked about the way in which the Jews gave up the true God for the god of the philosophers.

Today, I would like to pick up and build on that material. Obviously, we would like to solve the problems of Genesis 1, because, for you and me, they can be solved. They do not have to be problematic. Part of the time we will look at clarifying names, because there is no small amount of confusion when it comes to the aspect of the name of God. We will also establish who was, and is, the God of Israel. We will have a look at the real nature of God as established within God's word; so that we can really understand *who and what is God?*

We read:

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God ...

... and we stopped there because, in Hebrew we have had only two words and we already have two problems. The commentators are already scratching their heads! They look at: *In the beginning* and they say: "Is it absolute, or is it relative? Should we translate it as: *In the beginning*, or should we translate it as: *In beginning?*"

When they have spent twelve pages on that matter, they move on to the second word which is *Elohim*. They say: "Why should this word be in the plural?"

That's the way in which the Bible starts!

At the same time, they say:

"No other creation account is graced with an introduction of the majesty and the grandeur of Genesis, chapter one, verse one."

It's a magnificent statement about the creation, but for them it's problematic. So they have the problem of the two Hebrew words, and two problems: typical of Hebrew! It is said that if you have two Jews, you've got three opinions. The problem is that of approaching the Hebrew language with the wrong mindset.

In looking for a solution, commentators realise the answer to the first question is provided in two places. The first is that in terms of the Masoretes who we introduced you to a number of months ago in the sermon about the book of Daniel. They were the heirs to the Sopherim, the people who copied the scrolls.

Round about the sixth century, they introduced the vowels to the Hebrew language so that it would not be lost. They pointed and provided vowels for Genesis 1:1 to read in a particular way. So commentators go to them and rely upon their interpretation.

But there is another solution as well - and that solution solves both problems. Today we are looking at the nature of God and we are looking at *Elohim*, rather than *In the beginning...* or *In beginning...*, so we can look at that other solution.

The other area they go to is, in fact, within the Bible, so it is the most authoritative, the most important one for us to examine. The Bible answers this particular question in one particular book. It's very important because, in reality, people have only come to understand some of these things about this particular book over the last 50 years. That's quite amazing!

Up until 50 years ago, this particular book of the Bible was written off as being a Hellenistic or a Greek style book. It was thought that it had been brought into the Bible, that it had no relationship to Jesus Christ at all, but that it was an attempt to make the Bible into a theology book because it was philosophical in nature. It had no historical connections with the land and with the real Jesus in any way whatsoever.

A little over fifty years ago a number of things happened. Fifty-five or fifty-six years ago, the state of Israel was formed and archaeology started in a great way. They found a number of things that relate to this book. They found the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem that no one had known about for the last 2000 years. Josephus hadn't written about it. In this book of the Bible was the only reference to the pool of Bethesda that existed from ancient literature. People suddenly stopped and said: "This particular book knows something about New Testament times!"

Then they found a little more. In some of the priestly homes in Jerusalem they found large stone jars that had been used for purification. They recognised these large stone jars from the same book.

Then they found the Dead Sea Scrolls. They started interpreting the Dead Sea Scrolls and they found certain similarities between the Temple Scroll and this particular book, and they started to look at it in a different way.

This book I am talking about is the gospel of John.

Once you start to look at a book in a different way and you start to realise this book is not just a Greek implant in the Bible, that this is, in fact, a Jewish book, you start to examine everything. In the early 1950's, one man started translating the book of John from Greek into English and he said there was a problem with it. He said:

"The vocabulary is very simple but the Greek is obtuse. It's difficult because of the way in which John frames his sentences."

Eventually, looking at it, he said:

"The man writing this Greek is a Jew, not a Greek, and he is a Hebrew speaker writing in Greek as he would speak in Hebrew. Therefore we had better look at this book a little more carefully - from a Hebraic point of view."

Some people went so far as to say that the gospel of John was, in fact, written firstly in Hebrew or Aramaic, and then translated into Greek. The first time I came upon this idea was picking up a book written by a French cleric from the 1950's who started to translate John 1 into Hebrew. He found that John 1:1 was written in exactly the same meter and style and rhythm as Genesis 1:1! In fact, it goes a little further than that because the first 18 verses of John 1 are referred to as a prologue. Most commentators dismiss it as being an ancient Christian hymn. They do that because then they don't have to take any cognisance of what it says.

"It's just poetic and they are just saying something to make people feel good. You don't have to place any credence upon it for understanding. It's just nice writing."

As people have gone along, they have come to realise that the first 18 verses of John 1 are, in fact, built upon exactly the same structure as Genesis chapter 1. It doesn't cover the same material, but it is built on exactly the same basis. We don't have time to look at it today, but it is worthwhile considering the reliance of John 1:1-18 upon Genesis chapter 1 - and Genesis chapter 2 - and Genesis chapter 3!

There is a lesson why God insisted on Mr. Armstrong taking us back to the two trees so frequently! Because, surprise, surprise, if you look carefully enough and you understand enough, the two trees are really the subject of the first 18 verses of John 1.

So we have John 1:1-2 which gives us not only the answer to the first question from Genesis 1, but also provides us with the answer to the second question as to why the word *Elohim* is in the plural.

John is wrestling with the Greek language now, which has its own problem, because in Greek, the word for God is singular! So how do you get around turning a singular into a plural? Well, that's what John does. He said:

***John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 He was in the beginning with God.***

In other words, there is an equality of some form between what we call God and the Word. The Word was God. Many of you will probably say: "The 'Word' is *Logos* which is a Greek word," but if you look at the Greek understanding of *Logos*, you'll never ever come to understand John 1:1.

However, if you look at the way in which the Hebrews used the word *Logos* in their writing and in their translations into the Greek, you'll very quickly come to understand who the *Logos* was. We will leave that for another time.

John very clearly states:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John's view of Jesus was as the Word. He was part of what God was. In reality, the word *Elohim* has to be a plural word because already, in Genesis 1, at the very beginning, there was a plurality in the Godhead.

Hebrew is the only known language in which the principal word for *God* is a plural word! Even the cognate languages like Aramaic, and the other Semitic languages do not have a plural name for God! They are all singular. Yet God inspired that His name be in the plural.

What John is describing is the relationship that exists. We talked about that relationship last time. In verse 14 of chapter 1, John describes the relationship that now exists between the Father and the Son.

What is God at this point in time? He is the Father and the Son.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Last time we looked at the family relationship, referring to Paul in Ephesians 3. That is something that John understands very well also. Consider how John then goes on and develops the family relationship. Notice what he records:

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (power) to become children of God ...

Who are we talking about? Are we talking about God the Father or are we talking about the Word? The context is the Word, so the Word has the power to enable a person to become the Son of God, to enter into the family relationship.

***12 ... to those who believe in His name:
13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.***

So the ultimate sense is that human beings have the ability, based on salvation, and based upon change in their lives, to become part of the family of God!

John sees Jesus in another light as well. He makes a very categorical statement about Jesus Christ, about the Word:

John 1:3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

What does he see Jesus as? What does he see the Word as? He sees Him as the Creator.

The Apostle Paul sees Jesus Christ in exactly the same manner:

***Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.
17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.***

He was the agent of creation. Where did Paul and John derive that from? They derived it from:

Genesis 2:4 This is the history (the generations) of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

There is something tucked into that verse which is very easily overlooked, because we put the emphasis on God, *Elohim*. But is that where the emphasis should be?

Let's take a little digression. Let's take a lesson in reading the English Bible with all of its warts and peculiarities, because it has some - especially when it comes to the nature of God. There are a number of names used for God throughout the Old Testament. We will look firstly at the Old Testament, rather than the New Testament because that is where the problem arises in the first place.

The word *God* is translated from the Hebrew word *Elohim*. Sometimes it is *El*, *Eloah* or various other derivatives of that word. *God*, either in caps (GOD) or with a capital G followed by lower case letters (God) is from the Hebrew word, principally, *Elohim*.

The word *Lord*, when the word is capitalised with small caps (LORD) - is from another word: *Yahweh*. Some of the literal translations like Young's, Darby or the American Standard Version refer to it as *Jehovah*.

We then have names like *LORD GOD* which we have just met in Genesis 2:4, which of course relate to *Yahweh Elohim*. If one were to take the Hebrew for it, it would be *Yahweh Elohim*, putting the first two words together.

The Greek word for *God* is *Theos*. The Greek word which is translated from the word *Yahweh* is *Kurios*. There is also *Kurios Theos*, both in the Greek translations of the Old Testament and the equivalent in the New Testament. When it is referring to *Elohim*, it normally uses the word *Theos* and when it is referring to the word *Lord* or *Yahweh*, it will normally use the word *Kurios*.

We have another word as well, which is *Lord* in lower case, which comes from the Hebrew word, *Adonai*, which simply means *master* or *ruler*.

Let's look at these words in a little more detail. Let's look at *God*. As I said, *Elohim* is the principal word used for God throughout the Old Testament. It is used some 2,500 times.

The Hebrew also uses *El* or *Eloah* or *Aleyon*.

In Genesis 17:1 the Lord appears to Abraham.

Genesis 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God ..."

... "I am El Shaddai" (*God Almighty, the Almighty God*). He describes Himself as the Almighty God.

As I mentioned earlier on, Hebrew is the only language in which the normal word for *God* is in the plural. As a noun, it takes both singular or plural. For instance:

Genesis 1:1 In beginning God created ...

Created is the third person singular. Yet, we move on to verse 26:

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness ..."

... after Our kind. Third person plural!

So the word *Elohim* can be used in plural or singular usages when it is used by itself as *Elohim*.

What about *LORD* in uppercase? The Hebrew word from which it is derived is known as a Tetragrammaton: 4 letters: Y-H-W-H ** (Yud-Heh-Waw-Heh). In the 19th century, they read it as J-H-V-H and translated it as *Jehovah*. That's why Young's, the American Standard Version and other translations that were translated in the 19th century and early 20th century, which seek to be literal, translate it as *Jehovah*.

[Note that Hebrew reads from right to left, so the letters would actually be in reverse order - i.e. HWHY.]**

As times progressed, people came to realise that it is not J-H-V-H. It should be Y-H-W-H. So it is now translated as *Yahweh*. Most English translations though, never use the word *Yahweh*. They note the sensitivities of the Jewish people and translate it as *LORD* or *Lord*.

I have a Hebrew Bible. It has the Tetragrammaton all the way through it. But if you get a Jew to read it, he will never say *Yahweh*. He will simply say *Adonai*. In some cases they may say *HaShem* (*the name*). They don't want to use that word, lest they take it in vain. It developed a certain mysticism of its own, where it was only used by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. So although the Jewish Bible continues to use the word *Yahweh*, they never read it as *Yahweh*. They always transliterate and superimpose the word *Adonai* instead.

I don't know how we got into this but I presume that when the King James translators were translating from the Hebrew into English, they asked the Jews, "How do you pronounce this word?"

They simply said: *Adonai*!

So they asked them: "How do you pronounce this other word, *Adonai*?"

They said: *Adonai*!

So the translators scratched their heads, and said: "Well that doesn't quite make sense, but that's what you say and you are the authority so we'll use the word *Lord*." In fact they followed the example set by Jerome in translating the Vulgate, the Latin translation that had been used throughout western Europe for the past millennia.

In today's modern translations when they continued to use *LORD*, it is not a problem of translation so much as recognising the sensitivities of the Jewish people in the usage of that word. So they translate it as *LORD*. Rather than putting it in lower case, they put it in upper case. They capitalise it. The Jews substitute the word *Adonai* for it.

The word *Yahweh* is derived from Exodus 3:14 where God (*Yahweh*) appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

Exodus 3:13 (American Standard Version) And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them?

14 And God (Elohim) said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

15 And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, Jehovah (Yahweh Elohim), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

The word *Yahweh* is derived from this expression in Exodus 3:14: "I AM WHO I AM."

As we move along, you'll recognise that the concept of I AM becomes a very powerful statement in terms of scripture, in terms of divinity.

The interesting thing, returning to *Yahweh*, is that it is often coupled with the word *Elohim*. We've seen it already in Exodus 3:15. We find the two words together: *Yahweh Elohim*. That should not be forgotten. As the American Standard Version translated it: *Jehovah is your Elohim - Yahweh is your God*.

Let's look at the word *Lord* - the word that is normally translated from *Adonai*. It's referring to a master/servant relationship. It is talking about rulership. It is an exceptional usage though.

Abram was wondering about his descendants:

***Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD (Yahweh) came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."
2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"***

Taking from what I have given you before, should we translate *Lord God* as *Adonai Elohim*? No, not at all!

It is not *Adonai Elohim*. It is, in fact, *Adonai Yahweh*. The English language translates it *Lord God*, because how do you have *Lord*, *LORD*? We've already created a problem for ourselves by not using the word *Yahweh*, and substituting the word *Adonai* in accordance with Jewish custom. So what happens when you get *Adonai* and *Yahweh* together? People opt for an easy way out.

The translators, following the Jewish approach, opted for *Lord God*. At least they got half of it right! The first word is *Adonai*, but the second word is not *Elohim*. The second word is *Yahweh*.

To give you an idea of the confusion that can exist, that occurs some 305 times throughout the Old Testament, and most of us read over it without ever considering it.

The majority of references to *God* in the Old Testament are to *Yahweh* translated as *LORD* in capitals, *Yahweh Elohim* translated as *LORD God* (once again, *LORD* in capitals), or *Adonai Yahweh: Lord God*.

Let's have a look and see how this applies. Let's read one of those classic monotheistic scriptures carefully:

Deuteronomy 6:4 (King James Version) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God (Yahweh our Elohim) is one LORD (Yahweh):

What is the subject of the sentence? It is *Yahweh*, is it not? This sentence is a statement about *Yahweh*. It's rather interesting to see the way in which the New Revised Standard Version and the Tanakh translates it:

4 "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (NRSV).

4 "The Eternal is our God, the Eternal alone"(Tanakh).

The Hebrew word *echad* that is translated as *one* in the King James Version is a word which described primacy or supremacy: first, above all else! Deuteronomy 6:4 is a statement about *Yahweh*. It is not a statement about *Elohim*. In Hebrew, it simply reads:

"Sh'ma, Yisra'el! Yahweh Elohenu, Yahweh echad."

The *nu*, the possessive pronoun, is literally built into the word, *Elohim (Elohenu)*. It is not two separate words. One has to be careful, because many lies have been established upon the misuse of this scripture! This is a statement about *Yahweh*, not about *Elohim*.

Who then is *Yahweh*? We have met Him in terms of Genesis 2:4 (His role in creation). What are some of the

scriptures that shaped John's statement about the Word? If we carry on through Genesis 2, we find scriptures like verse 19:

Genesis 2:19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them ...

Who was it who caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam? Who was it who took a rib from the side of Adam and shaped Eve? Who was it who walked in the cool of the garden with Adam and Eve? It was none other than *Yahweh Elohim*.

The Psalmist has this to say:

Psalm 33:6 By the word of the LORD (Yahweh) the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

It's rather interesting to note that he said: "By the word of the Eternal ..." The Hebrew for the term *word*, is *dabar* - which, if you translate it into Greek, becomes *Logos*. The word *dabar* is only associated with one particular individual throughout the Old Testament, and that is Yahweh. It is always *the word of Yahweh* that comes to the prophets, or that comes to Moses. He is the One who speaks and instructs the people.

Zechariah 14:9 relates to the return of Jesus Christ as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." It talks about the battle that He will rage against humanity on that day. We end up with Jerusalem being the centre of the earth, and all nations coming up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. The setting of it is the Day of the Lord. So what does it have to say about Yahweh?

***9 And the LORD (Yahweh) shall be King over all the earth.
In that day it shall be "The LORD (Yahweh) is one,"
And His name one.***

In other words, John very clearly saw an equation between Yahweh and Jesus Christ. You might say that from creation to the Kingdom of God, Jesus is linked very clearly in John's mind with the role and the actions of Yahweh.

One can go into the book of Revelation which was also written by John under the inspiration of God, and you can see the way in which he equates that aspect of Jesus Christ being "Lord of Lords and King of Kings," and ruling over all of the earth just as Zechariah promised.

It wasn't just John who had this idea. Jesus Christ had this idea as well. Jesus describes Himself as the *I AM* throughout John's gospel.

Let's go back to this definition of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14-15. We find Jesus Christ being described and describing Himself in some very tense situations as being *I AM*.

Notice John 8:56-58. The setting is the Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus Christ is in the temple preaching and teaching. On this occasion, He is having a tête-à-tête with the religious leaders. He said to them:

***John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."
57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"
58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."***

Read the response to understand the import of what Jesus Christ was saying:

59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

They understood it, because they picked up stones to stone Him. Once again, His Father enabled Him to be safely escorted out of their presence because His time was not yet. But here, He made a bold statement to them - *I AM*. They understood exactly to whom He was relating Himself. They had no difficulty with making that connection. They understood it perfectly.

John 18 records how Jesus Christ and the disciples left after the Passover and were going out to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed and eventually Judas turns up with the guards to arrest Jesus. Jesus said to them: "Who are you looking for?"

John 18:5 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am ..."

The translators added "he" to make sense of it, failing to realise that it did not need to be added!

5 ... And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them.

6 Now when He said to them, "I am ...," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Why would they draw back and fall to the ground? I guess that there are a number of reasons. They may have thought this guy was blaspheming and God was about to strike Him with fire and lightning and so they were getting out of there as quickly as they could.

Why would they think He was blaspheming if they didn't understand what He was saying? They understood perfectly what Jesus Christ was saying about Himself. It may also have been that they backed off out of fear, out of reverence for the name being uttered, rather than just to avoid the lightning that might strike.

Whatever it was, it brought about a marked reaction from them, with them tripping over one another. It's rather amusing in its own way isn't it? Here is this band of men come out with swords, shields and spears to arrest you and they are lying on the ground, flat on their backs in front of you, instead of turning and running!

7 Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

8 Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am ..."

He tells them, *I AM*, 3 times in very short succession. Throughout his gospel John uses a number of other occasions in which he talks about Jesus being:

I AM ... the light!

I AM ... the life of man!

I AM ... the true bread!

I AM ... the true shepherd!

I AM ... the true vine!

Why? He is using those titles very instructively. Jesus Christ knew what his pre-existent state was. He had no difficulty understanding His position and His pre-existent state.

Perhaps some of what I have covered this afternoon will help you appreciate Matthew 11:27 a little more fully. Jesus Christ said to the disciples:

Matthew 11:27 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

An understanding of the Father has to be a matter of revelation from Jesus Christ. The Father was not known.

Philo, a Jewish writer living in Alexandria, Egypt, just prior to the time of Christ wrote:

"Yes, there is a God, a great transcendent God out there somewhere who has some sort of relationship with us; but His relationship with us is through the Logos."

He had no appreciation whatsoever of the Father as He really was, nor the relationship the Father desires to have with us through His Son, Jesus Christ - the One who was Yahweh.

It is rather interesting that of the four gospels, two in particular deal with the Father - Matthew and John! They deal with the revealing of the Father to the disciples and to us at great length.

What Matthew has recorded for us in Matthew 11:27 is in the context of Christ revealing the Father, and the Father's relationship with the disciples, to the disciples and to those who have been called.

Let's then look at the real nature of *God*, of the *Elohim*.

In Exodus chapters 33 & 34 we have an occasion in which Moses was able to record a lesson for us. Moses got caught up in a very human situation, because like most human beings, he wanted to know the physical aspects of God.

Moses is on Mt. Sinai with Yahweh asking Yahweh if he could see what He was like. He said: "Let me see You!"

Exodus 33:12 Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.'

13 "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people."

14 And He (Yahweh) said, "My Presence will go with you ..."

"... I will always be there."

17 So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

18 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

"Let me see Your glory! What do You look like?"

19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

20 But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."

21 And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock."

22 "So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by."

23 "Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

Moses had to bring the tablets up to Yahweh so that they could be engraved again (Exodus 34:1-4).

Exodus 34:6 And the LORD (Yahweh) passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD (Yahweh), the LORD God (Yahweh Elohim), merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

7 "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

It is interesting to see Moses' reaction. As a result of the proclamation of the name of Yahweh, did Moses stand and try to see the back part of God? Well, it actually says:

8 So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Moses had come to understand the really important thing about God. It is not what He looks like. It's what He is!

What is His character? Here the Eternal described the character of *Yahweh Elohim* and of the Father, for that matter as well, because they are equal in character. They are the same in character. They are not different.

So when Philip asked Jesus (in John 14) to "show us the Father," Jesus Christ could say to him:

John 14:9 ... "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

"... What do you want to see about the Father? Do you want to see His character? You've seen it in Me. It is identical character."

So we can ask ourselves, *who and what is God?* God is a family - presently comprised of the Father (who Jesus revealed), and the Son who is the Word and who was known to Israel as *Yahweh* - a family into which those called of God can be born.

So when Paul talks about God, or *Theos*, in whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, he understood the same thing that John was speaking of. It wasn't a matter of Aristotelian metaphysics. It was a matter of understanding who God was and the way it was that *Yahweh* had associated with Israel, the way in which He had revealed Himself. Jesus Christ had now revealed the Father to them as well.

The God family is known and defined by the spiritual qualities and not metaphysics. It's defined by its spiritual qualities and of course the consequence is that if we are to become part of the family, we must also develop those same spiritual qualities within ourselves.

The Apostle Paul talks about us "putting on Christ." What does he mean by that? He is talking about putting on the very character of Christ! Why the character of Christ? Because that is the one that has been revealed to us, who is exactly the same as the character of the Father, so we can take on the family characteristics, the spiritual qualities of the family.

Paul talks about the old man being crucified and becoming a new man in terms of the spiritual qualities of our lives - the spiritual character that is required of us.

You might say that the answer to *Who and what is God?* is not to be found outside of God's word. Who and what God is, is clearly defined within the word of God. We can come to have a relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ and we can look forward to an even closer relationship, as we become part of that very family.

Last time I read to you a quotation from the Encyclopaedia Judaica. Lest any of this seem strange, let me read to you a comment that was penned a little over ten years ago and published in a Biblical journal. The writer said:

"... that it was something of a puzzle to explain how a group of Jews best known to all in antiquity for their absolute insistence on the oneness of God and their refusal to grant worship to any other, should come in the middle of the first century to worship the man, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they call the Messiah."

The writer got a few details wrong, because it was before the middle of the 1st century. It was round about 31 A.D. - before the first third of the century was out. They came to understand perfectly who Jesus Christ was.

The article continues:

"The question becomes even more puzzling when you consider that those Jews who believed in Jesus gave Him titles, apparently ascribing to Him qualities and actions previously reserved for God alone."

The author is wrestling with the problem. He is trying to get his understanding through the metaphysical ontological understanding of the nature of God. He is standing there scratching his head wondering: "How did these people ever do it?"

They didn't ask the questions he asked! They simply read God's word and they came to the right conclusions; the conclusions that God had revealed for them.

So, we don't have to go beyond God's word to have an understanding of *who and what is God*. We don't have to go beyond God's word to have an understanding of the relationship that we can have with the members of the God family. They are very real.

Yahweh was a God that was very real to the children of Israel, especially those that feared Him and served Him. He was very real to the likes of David and the prophets and those whom God used to lead those people spiritually.

So Jesus Christ can be very real to us today and we can have a very real relationship with Him, where He is our elder brother. He has taken upon Himself the afflictions of being a human being, and as the writer in Hebrew said:

Hebrews 9:8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

That is the type of God that we worship - a God that can be very real to us. God wants to have a very personal, close, intimate relationship with us. He is not a God that is detached and removed, One who has no understanding of the creation of His hands!

*... Peter Nathan
09 Sept 03*

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