

Prestonwood Bible Fellowship
Winter/Spring 2013



ESSENTIALS

REINFORCING OUR FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Week 1 | God Is Different from Us

Isaiah 46:3–11

<p>HOOK NOTES</p> <p>Q: Try for a moment to describe what it means to be “eternal” or “holy” or “ever-present.” What words did you find yourself using?</p> <p>Q: Did you feel you communicated an accurate and complete definition or illustration? Why or why not?</p>	<p>MAIN IDEA: “The incommunicable attributes of God are perhaps the most easily misunderstood, probably because they represent aspects of God’s character that are least familiar to our experience.”¹</p> <p>HOOK (Choose One)</p> <p>Illustration: In the book <i>The Silver Chair</i> from the Chronicles of Narnia, by C.S. Lewis, the evil queen of the Underworld attempts to bewitch the children, Prince Rilian and Puddleglum. As they fight to withstand her enchantments, they try to remind one another of truth: There is a sky, a sun ... and there is Aslan. But try as they might to fill their minds with the transcendence of these things, they find themselves trying to make a comparison to things more tangible.</p> <p>Have your class describe Aslan the lion from the Chronicles of Narnia. See if they can correctly describe the main physical details of this fictional character. Now have your class describe President Abraham Lincoln. List the physical traits about the president that most people know from history courses and the recent film <i>Lincoln</i>. Finally, have them try to describe who God is (limit descriptions of His attributes, i.e. loving, caring, etc.).</p> <p>Note how hard it is to completely picture both characters of fiction and non-fiction, let alone our almighty God.</p> <p>Current Event: In 2011, epic movies competed for box-office supremacy. Of these, the finale of Christopher Nolan’s Batman trilogy, <i>The Dark Knight Rises</i>, grossed more than \$1 billion. To date, it has become the seventh highest-grossing trilogy finale of all time, as noted by businessinsider.com.</p> <p>Ask your class members if they can name the other six trilogies that beat out the Batman series for most popular trilogies. (Answers: #6 <i>Men in Black</i>. #5 <i>Star Wars</i>. #4 <i>Spider-Man</i>. #3 <i>Toy Story</i>. #2 <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>. #1 <i>Transformers</i>.)</p> <p>Discuss as a class why these movies receive so much attention, followers and gross revenue. Ask what these movies hope to accomplish in their story-telling and metanarratives (stories that link each movie).</p> <p>Now have your class list how we can help people see the greater story of God and His love for us (words or deeds). Personally state how you show and tell God’s message to others so they can see Him in all His glory.</p>
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¹ Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 160.

<p>BOOK NOTES</p> <p>Key Point: The important reality to remember is God is different from us. He is greater than we. Everything that is created (included humans) is an overflow of God’s love and power. He is knowable, but only in that He has chosen to make Himself known.</p> <p>46:3-4: Q: What do these verses reveal about God’s character?</p>	<p>MAIN IDEA: “The incommunicable attributes of God are perhaps the most easily misunderstood, probably because they represent aspects of God’s character that are least familiar to our experience.”²</p> <p>BOOK</p> <p>Background: God is different from us. He is the Creator. We are the created. Many of the characteristics of God, such as knowledge, mercy and justice, can be seen through His image bearers (us!). However, other attributes of God’s essence such as His independence (He is self-existent, not created), His unchangeableness and His omnipresence (He is everywhere all the time) are not so easily seen in humanity.</p> <p>Typically, these less-observable attributes of God are referred to as “incommunicable.” This simply means that they are not possessed by people. However, they are to a small degree reflected in God’s people. For example, God is completely unchangeable, and yet while we do change (grow in age, wisdom, stature, etc.), we do not change completely (we remain human). The important reality to remember is God is different than us. He is greater than us. Everything that is created (included humans) is an overflow of God’s love and power. He is knowable, but only in that He has chosen to make Himself known.</p> <p>Like the Israelite people, we, too, need to be reminded to reflect upon how God is different from us, so that we might repent of seeking other things more than God. We must not elevate other things to God’s place of prominence, even the benefits that He provides. The prophet Isaiah delivers such an exhortation in Isaiah 46.</p> <p>Exegesis of Isaiah 46:3–11 with <i>ESV Study Bible Notes</i></p> <p>46:3–4 borne by me. While the idols must be carried, the God of Israel carries his people. the remnant. Those who survived the Babylonian captivity. from before your birth ... even to your old age. There is never one moment when God fails his people. I am he ... I will carry and will save. God emphasizes his personal commitments to his people.</p> <p>46:5 To whom will you liken me? Biblical faith refuses to limit God to analogies within the creation. Though God teaches about himself with many analogies throughout the Bible, in the end no analogy, and no combination of analogies, can adequately describe the greatness of God.</p>
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² Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 160.

<p>BOOK NOTES</p> <p>Key Passage (Isa. 46:9–11): Isaiah makes it explicit to his listeners that God is not like them, nor is He like anything that they or the surrounding culture has imaged Him to be. He is eternal. He is the director of history. His plans and purposes will come to pass because He is all-powerful, all-knowing, present everywhere all the time. He is completely above and other than His creation and anything His creation can come up with to describe Him or attempt to replace Him.</p>	<p>46:6–7 Created gods are dependent on their creators. they carry it. If a god has to be carried, how can it unburden its worshipers? it cannot move. If a god cannot move, how can it intervene? it does not answer or save. Gold and silver are lavished on the god, to no benefit. Isaiah’s contempt is obvious.</p> <p>46:8–13 The only true God will succeed in his glorious purpose for his stubborn people.</p> <p>46:8–11. stand firm. God calls his people to a bold trust in his sole deity and sovereign ways. recall to mind. Mental focus on who God is must be renewed, for the idolatrous culture of the world erodes clarity. transgressors. The natural thoughts of the human mind resist the truth about God. the former things of old. The record of God’s faithfulness in the past. declaring ... saying ... calling. God calls for a wholehearted trust in his unfailing word. a bird of prey from the east. Cyrus.</p> <p>Cross References</p> <p>Job 38:1–42:6 <i>Challenge: The Lord Answers Job.</i> The Lord responds in two speeches, each followed by a brief response from Job. In the first, the Lord asks Job whether he knows how creation and its creatures are governed (38:1–40:2). Job, now made conscious of his ignorance, responds by pledging silence (40:3–5). In his second speech, the Lord asks Job particularly about power in relation to himself and other creatures he has made (40:6–41:34). Job, directly aware of God as never before, responds by humbly submitting to God’s sovereignty and penitently despising himself for his earlier wild words (42:1–6). While Job rightly defended himself against his friend’s accusations of sin and had defined his circumstances as being governed by God, he had drawn conclusions about what his affliction meant that did not account sufficiently for what was hidden in the knowledge and purposes of God.</p> <p>Acts 17:24–25: Paul speaks of the God who made the world and everything in it, including mankind. He identifies this one true God as superior to all the lesser, comparing deities that might be worshiped in Athens, with all their foibles and weaknesses. When Paul says that “God ... does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands” (cf. 7:48), it is easy to imagine him gesturing toward the magnificent temple, the Parthenon, that stood just above him and his leaders on the acropolis. Paul was claiming that the true God of heaven and earth does not live in temples like the Parthenon and is not served by sacrifices that the Athenians regularly took to their temples.</p>
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<p>Q: “As your theology [knowledge of God] increases so should your doxology [worship of God].” What does this mean for today’s lesson?</p> <p>Q: Do you know anyone who holds to any of the non-Judeo/Christian views of God?</p> <p>Q: What would be “Good News” about who God is to individuals who held each of those views?</p>	<p>Thoughts from Danny Akin⁵ Dr. Akin provides a helpful summary of the incommunicable attributes of God and humanity’s necessary response:</p> <p>Sovereignty: absolute rule; <i>Our Response:</i> We are assured that His purposes will be accomplished.</p> <p>Aseity: self-existence; <i>Our Response:</i> Realization of our utter dependence on God who is the cause of our existence and the reason we continue to exist.</p> <p>Omnipresence: God is everywhere; <i>Our Response:</i> It is comforting knowing God is with us.</p> <p>Infinity: without limits; <i>Our Response:</i> We are assured that God can do anything and meet any need we have.</p> <p>Omniscience: God is all-knowing; <i>Our Response:</i> We can feel secure and comforted by realizing God sees and knows everything. We should be challenged to think and act at all times as if we lived in public, for God is always our audience.</p> <p>Eternality: God is timeless; <i>Our Response:</i> We are assured that God has no time limits and that His purposes cannot be frustrated by time and space.</p> <p>Immutability: God is unchangeable; <i>Our Response:</i> We can have complete trust in God because His promises will be kept and His nature will not change.</p> <p>Omnipotence: God is all-powerful; <i>Our Response:</i> We should be humbled and comforted as we trust and serve our God who can accomplish whatever He pleases and who is not hindered by human limitations.</p> <p>Immateriality: God is Spirit; <i>Our Response:</i> The basis of our faith and life is the unseen spiritual world, which is “more real” than our physical, material world.</p> <p>Diagram (next page): Biblical Theism teaches that God is different than His creation, yet He is intimately involved in relationship with His creation. This unique relationship is referred to as God’s “transcendence” (otherness) and “imminence” (His intimacy with creation), and a demonstration of God’s love for His creation, most of all humanity.</p> <p>Atheism teaches that there is no god. Pantheism teaches that everything in the world is god. Deism teaches that god is different than creation and is therefore inaccessible for his creation. Finite theism teaches that god is distinct but limited in his power and ability to govern and interact. Panentheism teaches that god is in everything, god is the world. Polytheism teaches that there are many gods.</p>
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⁵ Excerpt from *Christian Theology: An Overview*, by Dr. Daniel Akin, used with permission

Seven Major World Views

Atheism: A World Without God



Theism: A World Plus an Infinite God



Pantheism: A World That Is God



Deism: A World On Its Own Made by God



Finite Theism: A World With a Finite God



Panentheism: A World In God



Polytheism: A World With Many Gods



<p>TOOK NOTES</p> <p>Q: How would you describe your worship? (e.g., inspiring, flat, joyful, distant, energetic, consuming, dull, exhausting, compartmentalized, renewing, self-focused, awe-filled, distracted, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What are you believing about the world, yourself and God to cause your worship to be that way?</p> <p>Q: How might your worship change, according to a renewed sense of who God is?</p>	<p>MAIN IDEA: “The incommunicable attributes of God are perhaps the most easily misunderstood, probably because they represent aspects of God’s character that are least familiar to our experience.”⁶</p> <p>TOOK (Choose One)</p> <p>Why Should I Care? How Will This Impact Me? One of the most powerful ways the Enemy tempts and deceives is to water down God. We see it in the garden with the words he spoke to Eve, tempting her to disobedience, causing her to doubt His word (both His righteous command and His goodness): “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” and “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” [see Genesis 3:1–4] When we diminish God, the result is disobedience, idolatry and death.</p> <p>On the other hand, in God (and only in Him) there is life: 1 John 5:10–12 “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”</p> <p>How Can I Live Out This Essential Tomorrow? God does not owe humanity anything. Instead, “He is high above our understanding” and He “sees things we can never see.” He is a mystery unfathomable. But even though He is a mystery to us, and though many things both about Him and our lives are hidden from our knowledge, <i>He knows everything</i>. Nothing that happens in history or in our individual lives takes Him by surprise.</p> <p>For us, the doctrine of a transcendent (different than us) God impacts our actions in this way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Awe at His beauty and mystery (resulting action: worship) b) Ever-increasing trust in His good and holy will (resulting action: prayer and study of His Word) c) Recognition that He is Lord and Savior of all, and humanity needs to know Him (resulting action: evangelism)
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⁶ Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 160.