

Knowing God in the Old Testament



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By Aled Seago

Introduction

There is a popular myth concerning God and the Old Testament. This myth is this: God is angry in the OT, and calms down in the NT. This is a myth, for God is always who he is: he doesn't change, and he isn't fickle like we are. Our studies for the next few weeks focus on the character of God, as revealed in the Old Testament.

Why the focus on God?

The first reply is of course, why not! Our hope is not in a system, but in a person. 'The Gospel' is not just 'how do I get saved?' but the gospel is the gift of God: *himself*. God is the gospel, he is the centre and goal of our hope. In these strange times, going back to focusing on the character of God, will be most beneficial. I know that for me, as a Christian minister with depression, it is immersing myself in the nature of God, and how unlike me he is, that is of most comfort. That's our prayer for this series.

Why just the OT?

It is true to say that most definitive theological statements, about God and other things, more often come from the New Testament, and not the Old. This helps us answer our question: Two thirds of the Bible consists of the Old Testament, and it reveals much about God's constant and consistent nature. It is a rich tapestry for us to admire.

How these studies work

Normally in our sermon series/bible studies we work our way through one book, or one section of a book of the Bible. Here, from different books, we see how they contribute towards our one theme: knowing God.

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Study 1: “I am who I am” (Ex 3:1-15)

Introduction: What does your name mean? If you have children, how did you decide what to name them?

Context: Read Exodus 1:1-11 and 2:23-25. What has happened to God’s people? What has God promised?

Listen: Read Ex 3:1-15

1. How has Moses got to where he has? (see chapter 2 for details)
2. What is remarkable about the bush?
3. Why does God mention Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?
4. What will God do for his people? What does that tell us about his nature?
5. What is God’s name in v14?
6. What does it mean?

Make it real

1. Read John 14:1-7. How does Jesus make God’s name known?
2. How is God’s name related to his character?
3. What does that do for our assurance and hope?
4. How can God’s name being God’s character help you as we begin a new time of lockdown?

“To say that God is simple is to say... hat in God, all his attributes are essential. There are no optional extras in God...It is not the case with God that some attributes are primary, some secondary.” – Mike Ovey, *The Goldilocks Zone* p190

Prayers

- Give thanks that God is what God does, and for the hope this gives us
- Praise God that in Jesus, we know him sufficiently
- Pray for one another to trust his faithfulness in lockdown
- Pray for one another's needs

Study 2: “My name is God Almighty” (Ex 5:22-6:8)

Intro: How do names/titles define relationships we have?

Recap: How is God’s name synomomous with his character/actions?

Listen: Read Exodus 5:22-6:8

1. What is the reason for Moses’ disappointment in God’s promises?
2. Why does God make the difference between God Almighty and LORD in v3?
3. What does that difference tell us about the relationship between God and his people?
4. What does God promise in v6-8? Is it different to last week?

Make it real

1. If God is the perfect promise keeper in scripture, what must he be like in order to keep his promises perfectly?
2. How does it make you feel that we have a personal, covenant relationship with the God of the universe?
3. How can reflecting on his perfect nature help you in these days?

Prayers

- Give thanks that God relates to us personally, and in covenant with us
- Give thanks we can know God, and his love for us is more than we can imagine
- Pray for our eyes as a church to be fixed on him in these days
- Pray for one another’s needs

Study 3: The Lord our Provider (Gen 22)

Intro: Can you think of a time in your life where you have been tested – be that an actual exam, a test of patience, endurance, or faith?

Context:

- What does God keep perfectly in scripture?
- Read Gen 12:1-3. What does God promise Abraham? How have we seen God work those promises in our last two studies in Exodus?

Listen: Read Genesis 22:1-8

1. Aside from asking for a child sacrifice, what is particularly shocking about God's request to Abraham, given what has come before?
2. How does Abraham respond? What do you think was going on in his mind? (See Romans 4:18-25, Hebrews 11:17-19)
3. What do you make of Isaac's somewhat passive role in this passage? Does he share his father's faith do you think?

Listen: Read Genesis 22:9-19

4. What does Abraham's conduct demonstrate about what he believes about God?
5. How does the LORD provide for Abraham and Isaac?
6. What does God promise? Are there differences?

Make it real

1. How, in Jesus, do we fully see how the Lord is our provider?
2. How is God still the perfect promise keeper in these verses?
3. How does that inform your hope?
4. How should we balance the present and future/eternal provision of God?

“Atonement is the work of God to create and ready his people for just these things: union with God and communion with others in a place of perfection, with a society of justice and peace and above all worship of the Lamb of God on the throne.” Scott McKnight in *A Community Call*
Atonement p27

Prayers

- Give thanks that, just as the ram dies for Isaac, Jesus Christ dies for us
- Pray for faith against all odds, like Abraham.
- Pray for one another's needs

Study 4: Presence, Glory and Compassion (Ex 33:12-23)

Intro: How would you define glory?

Recap:

- The Israelites have been set free from slavery in Egypt, and God has led them into the desert towards the promised land. He has given them ways to live in light of their salvation via the Ten Commandments. However, the people rebel. Read 32:1-7. What have they done? Why is it so abhorrent, given what we have learnt about God so far?
- Read v1-4 of chapter 33. Why is God right? How do the people respond? Why is that right?
- The people then wait to see what God will do: will he stay with them? As they wait to find out, Moses heads outside the camp, puts up a tent of meeting, to talk things over with God. He is covered with a cloud: the people know their mediator, Moses, is meeting with God. That meeting is what we read of in today's passage.

Listen: Read Exodus 33:12-23

1. What does Moses pray in v13? Why is that a good prayer for us?
2. How does God respond to that request? What does that tell us about God's character?
3. What does Moses ask in v18? Why does he ask it?
4. What is God's glory according to v19?
5. Why can't Moses see God's glory? What does that tell us about the relationship between our Creator and us as creatures?
6. How is God's mercy and compassion demonstrated here?

Make it real

1. Read Mark 4:45-51. How does glimpsing God's glory passing by change here? Why? What makes that possible?
2. How does Moses' prayers help us see how we are to pray? Would we be as bold/persistent as he is? Why/why not?

Prayers:

- Pray together these words: “Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart. Nought be all else to me, save that Thy art. Thou my best thought, in the day and the night. Waking or sleeping, Thou presence my light
- Give thanks that, in Jesus, God’s glory is not something we hide from, but hide *in*.
- Pray for one another’s needs

Study 5: The High and Exalted One (Isaiah 57:14-21)

Intro: “There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit.”- Ronald Regan. Discuss: is that true? Is that modelled in our world and church?

Recap: What have we seen of God's character so far? Is there a particular aspect you favour?

We have studied Isaiah before back in 2019/20. If you remember, the book is divided into 4 sections: Chapters 1-12, chapters 13-39, chapters 40-55, and chapters 56-66. In part 4, having glimpsed the heights of God's salvation plan in chapter 55, the people are far from those standards of God. This informs our passage today.

Listen: Read Isaiah 57:14-21

1. What is God like, according to v15? (It may be helpful to re-read Isaiah 6:1-4 as well)
2. What is the contrast he sets up here between Holy Creator and lowly creature?
3. What does this tell us about our rightful position before God? How might that help us from becoming too complacent?
4. What is the hope for sinners in this passage?
5. What is the warning to the arrogant and wicked?
6. How might we use this passage to speak to our friends who are self-satisfied?

Make it real

1. Read Philippians 2:5-11. What is Jesus' attitude that we are to imitate? What might that look like for
 - a. Our nation?
 - b. Our church?
 - c. Ourselves?

Prayers:

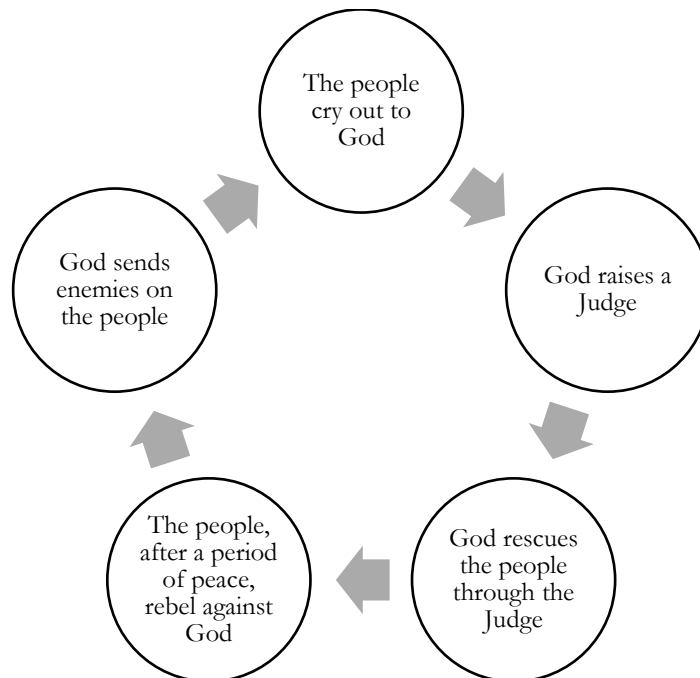
- Using Philippians 2, pray for one another, our church, and our nation, to have this attitude of Christ.
- Thank God that we whom have been humbled are able to shelter in his holiness through Christ.
- Pray for the Spirit's help in your holiness: whether you think you're doing well at it, or whether you think you're doing really badly!
- Pray for one another's needs

Study 6: The Lord is Peace (Judges 6:11-27)

Intro: “Christians should be pacifists.” – Discuss.

Context

Judges takes place many years after Exodus. After many years of wandering the desert, the original first generation of Israelites died before they reached the promised land, including Moses. Under Joshua’s leadership, the people take back the land for themselves. Yet peace is not guaranteed. The book of Judges is an ever-decreasing cycle:



It is a time when there is no king, and so everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

Listen: Read Judges 6:11-27

1. In lockdown, does Gideon’s question in v13 resonate with you? Is he wrong to ask?
2. Why is Gideon not the obvious choice?
3. Why is Gideon’s reaction in v22 right? How does God assure him?
4. What does Gideon call the altar?
5. Is this title a contradiction, given all the fighting in Judges and elsewhere in the OT?

Make it real

1. Read Isaiah 9:2-7. What is true peace? How is it made possible?
2. How can we reconcile God's acts of judgement with his acts of love? (Remember I AM WHO I AM)
3. What have you learnt about God in this series? Has anything particularly stood out for you?
4. How can you be encouraged, and encourage others, with God's character?

Prayers

- Pray that many of our loved ones, and in our community, will come to see peace with God
- Pray for areas that are torn by war and selfishness.
- Praise God for the peace we have with him
- Pray for one another's needs