

L LORD

OF HEAVEN & EARTH:

*LESSONS ON THE NATURE AND CHARACTER
OF THE GOD OF SCRIPTURE*

Grant Pickup
Embry Hills COC
Segment 4, 2020

LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH: Lesson Notes

****Class participants can prepare for each session by reading through the lesson notes and being prepared to discuss the Thought Questions in class****

LESSONS

1. TOTHEPRAISEOFHISGLORY

A lesson on Christian theology as a basis for praise to God

2. ETERNAL POWER & DIVINE NATURE

A lesson on the results and limitations of recognizing God in nature

3. MAKER OF HEAVEN & EARTH

A lesson on the identity of God revealed in the act of creation

4. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

A lesson on the transcendent nature of God

5. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

A lesson on the immanent character of God

6. HOW LONG, O LORD?

A lesson on God and the problem of evil

7. THE GOD OF ISRAEL

A lesson on the story of Yahweh, Israel, and the blessing of the world

8. GOD WITH US

A lesson on the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth

9. FATHER, SON & SPIRIT

A lesson on the Trinity revealed in salvation

10. ALPHA & OMEGA

A lesson on the God who makes all things new

LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH: Lesson Notes

LESSON 5: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD – God’s Immanent Character

- ❖ IMMANENCE – God is near to and intimately involved in his creation. He is able to act within and through the world.
- ❖ The Tent of Meeting
 - After receiving the Law on Mt. Sinai, in Exodus 24-5, the LORD gives Moses a new instruction – to build a sanctuary so that he can dwell among the people. Once complete, God’s glory in the fire-cloud descends and fills the Tabernacle.
 - God takes up residence among Israel in the Tabernacle, symbolized in two ways:
 - The Tabernacle (and later Temple built by Solomon) contained no image of Yahweh. Rather, God’s glory and presence dwelt therein above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.
 - The Tabernacle was positioned to sit at the center of the camp, surrounded by the people of the various tribes.
 - The entire idea of a Tabernacle or temple for God to reside is an example of God’s RELATIONALITY – that is, he desires relationship with his creation. He expands the borders of the sacred in order to work within the profane.
- ❖ God’s Relational Attributes
 - These are not ‘personality traits’ or ‘moods’ of God which may fluctuate. Also, these are not abstract concepts that God conforms to – rather, God is the source of all these things so they all are just perspectives on his overall divine being.
 - PERSONAL – the basis for his relationality. God is not a concept we can grasp or an object we can control. We speak to God as ‘You/Thou,’ not ‘it.’ This suggests that God is a person, and thus has personal relationships analogous to human personal relationships. These relationships can occur with individuals and larger social structures who take on a representative role for God into the wider world. (Is. 41:8-10 / Eph. 1:3-4 / Acts 17:24-29)
 - PURPOSEFUL – God executes plans and purposes for creation as revealed in Scripture. These are often accomplished through and for the sake of human creatures and human societies. (Is. 55:10-11 / Ps. 138:8 / Rom. 8:28 / Ps. 33:11)
 - PRESENT – God is close and active in human lives. The OT often figures God’s presence as his ‘face’ which could be taken away from human sin, or remains to answer prayer and give guidance for the faithful. (Is. 59:2 / Lam 2:8-9 / Josh. 1:5)
 - GOOD – God is good in all of his creations and accomplishments, and so goodness is the outcome of all of his thoughts and actions. That is, they aim at being pleasurable, suitable for their purpose, and morally right. The creation is good because God made it so, and God’s saving purposes are for good as well. (Ps. 34:8 / Gen. 1:31 / Rom. 8:28)
 - LOVING – To use the word ‘love’ to describe God is to encapsulate a feeling that is otherwise inexpressible. Therefore, John states that “God IS Love.” A simple description is that God is tender and compassionate, seeks good and does not take pleasure in suffering. His love is gracious in that it permits human freedom to love in return. (1 Jn. 4:8 / Hos. 11:1)
 - FAITHFUL – a product of God’s relationship with humanity by means of ‘covenant.’ Inasmuch as God enters into agreement with people, God is faithful

LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH: Lesson Notes

to the stated terms of those covenant agreements. God's faithfulness is to the uttermost, and maintains covenant allegiance even when humans sin and break the covenant. (Deut. 7:9 / Is. 49:7)

- MERCIFUL – Mercy follows from love and faithfulness. Where the actions of humans merit a withdrawal of God's love and faithfulness, he gives them anyway – and in abundance. The Hebrew word *chesed* [*kHES-ed*] – often translated as 'lovingkindness' – combines our separate ideas of love, faithfulness and mercy into a single idea that God repays good for evil. (Ps. 89:1 / Ps. 136 / Is. 63:7-9)
- RIGHTEOUS – God holds people accountable for their choices. That he desires to make all things right in light of human choices is his 'justice' or 'righteousness.' God can accomplish justice by means of retributive punishment for sin, establishing means of atonement, or restorative action to ensure the dignity of oppressed people. God's justice ensures that humans remain in good standing with each other, and God himself. (Ps. 89:14 / Ps. 146:7-8)
- WRATHFUL – God's actions of retributive punishment are described as 'anger' or 'wrath.' God is offended by sin and the dishonor of his people, and so he punishes to maintain his distinction from evil and his honorable name in the world. (Deut. 29:22-28 / Rom. 1:18)
- JEALOUS – Because God enters into relationships in which people become God's representation upon the Earth, God is 'jealous' or 'zealous' for their reciprocal faithfulness against their devotion to any other pseudo-god. Along with his wrath, God's jealousy is an expression of his concern for his own holiness and glory. (Ex. 34:13-14 / Ez. 39:25)
- ❖ Biblical Symbols of Immanence
 - Father – The concept is first used to describe Israel as God's son in their exodus from Egypt, and conveys the special choice of the people for God's provision and care. God loves his children by always seeking their well-being. (Ex. 4:22)
 - Shepherd – Similarly, God relates to his special people as the protector and guide of sheep. This too indicates God's care and leadership, with special emphasis on protection from enemies. (Ps. 23 / Ps. 100:3)
 - Judge – God's depiction as judge indicates his interest in the behavior of human beings and his intervention to hold them accountable. He is the sole arbiter of the merits of a person's deeds or heart, and executes his judgement in wrath for sinners or mercy for the righteous. (Rom. 2:1-11 / Ps. 7:6-9)
- ❖ In Praise of God
 - Psalm 23
- ❖ Thought Questions
 - What does it mean to have a 'personal relationship' with God? What insight does this way of speaking give for how a person (even yourself) thinks about God?
 - Is it necessary to juxtapose God's love and mercy on one hand, with God's justice and wrath on the other? What negative characteristics of God might be implied by thinking of these concepts as different temperaments of God?
 - Is human fatherhood a reflection of God as the True Father? Or is the biblical image of God as Father a metaphor based on just the best qualities of human fatherhood? Would your answer be the same about shepherds and judges?