



August 13, 2020

God's Greatness Seen in Both History and His Names

For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him. (Deut. 4:32–36)

God's greatness is not only seen in the invisible characteristics of God in nature, we also see evidence of his activity in history. In the passage above, we find Moses relating how God has acted in history, and especially in the history of the Jews. Throughout their history, the nature of God is revealed as a spiritual, invisible power that is present and moves in the lives of human beings.

God's power and personality, then, are perceived in both nature and history. In addition, his character is revealed in his names. The two primary names that come to us in the Old Testament are Elohim and Yahweh. Elohim reveals God's great creative and governing power, as in Genesis chapter 1. Yahweh (also translated as Jehovah) has the primary sense of a self-subsistent eternal being—one who does not depend on anyone else for his existence, but has "life in Himself" (John 5:26).

Abram calls the Lord Adonai in Genesis 15:2, which has a personal, possessive sense of "my Lord," and is often used in conjunction with Yahweh. This describes a personal, covenant-making God who holds people as his friends. God also identifies himself to Abram as El Shaddai in Genesis 17:1–2, the almighty God, all-abundant to his people. As he progressively reveals himself in the Old Testament, the names of God help us see more of the nature, personality, and character of God.

Practice: Soak in these big ideas about God's nature provided by the 19th-century Methodist biblical scholar Adam Clarke. Allow these thoughts to lead you to "rejoice in the Lord":

"God is the eternal, independent, and self-existent Being: the Being whose purposes and actions spring from himself, without foreign motive or influence: He who is absolute in dominion; the most pure, the most simple, the most spiritual of all essences; infinitely benevolent, beneficent, true and holy: The cause of all being, the upholder of all things; infinitely happy, because infinitely perfect; and eternally self-sufficient, needing nothing that he has made; illimitable in his immensity, inconceivable in his mode of existence, and indescribable in his essence; known fully only by himself, because an infinite mind can only be comprehended by itself. In a word, a Being who, from his infinite wisdom, cannot err or be deceived; and, from his infinite goodness, can do nothing but what is eternally just, right, and kind."