

Attributes of God in the Book of Proverbs

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Introduction

To speak of the attributes of God is to speak of His characteristics, His traits, His abilities, and, to a certain extent, His nature. Unworthy and finite human beings must ever approach such a study with unalloyed reverence. The attitudes of humility and meekness should characterize who would attempt to understand Him Who alone is infinite. He not only possesses certain traits, but He is flawlessly perfect in each one of them.

That having been said, it is necessary to investigate and understand the characteristics of Deity insofar as He has revealed Himself to men. One grand aim of all of God's revelation to us is to draw us to the likeness of His moral traits. Jesus thus urges us, "be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat. 5:48).¹ Likewise, Peter exhorted that, as He Who called us is holy, we are also to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15). To become Godlike we must understand everything we can about the attributes of God.

Another significant aim of God's revelation to us is to help us understand those attributes that belong to Deity alone and concerning which we must ever stand in reverential awe. God reveals such things as His glory and power by means of the very existence of the natural material universe: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Psa. 19:1). Paul made the same point: "For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity..." (Rom. 1:20). However, our Creator made such exclusive abilities even more specific in the special, supernatural revelation in His written Word. The book of Proverbs reveals some of these unique attributes, as we shall see.

The book of Proverbs is just that—a book of inspired proverbs on a wide range of subjects. It was not written to serve as a textbook on the attributes of God. However, in the course of its broad scope of subject matter, it expresses several of the Divine characteristics. We can only be blessed by examining them.

The Omnipresence of God

The doctrine that Deity is always everywhere all the time and that nothing escapes His notice is all but impossible for mortals to fathom, but the Bible often emphasizes this power. Solomon did not overlook this attribute of God in writing His Proverbs. Proverbs 5:21 declares: "For the ways of man are before the eyes of Jehovah; And he maketh level all his paths."

Chapter 15, verse 3 is somewhat of a commentary on the previous passage: “The eyes of Jehovah are in every place, Keeping watch upon the evil and the good.”

Proverbs 5 is devoted almost entirely to warnings against sexual immorality. The words of verse 21 are a solemn reminder that, though one may conceal his sin from friend and family, his behavior is ever “before the eyes of Jehovah.” The New Testament counterpart to these passages is Hebrews 4:13: “And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

While the sinner should dread the thought that the eyes of God are everywhere all the time, the Lord’s people can rejoice in the knowledge that His eyes take notice of them: “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister” (Heb. 6:10). It is quite possible that these verses provided the inspiration for the spiritual song, “There’s an All-Seeing Eye Watching You.” May this attribute of God discourage us from evil behavior even as it encourages us in godliness.

The Omniscience of God

The following statements in Proverbs set forth the concept of God’s omniscience:

Sheol and Abaddon are before Jehovah: How much more then the hearts of the children of men! (15:11).

Deliver them that are carried away unto death, And those that are ready to be slain see that thou hold back. If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not this; Doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his work? (24:11–12).

For one to be able to know the mysteries of Sheol and Abaddon and to know so as to correctly “weigh” the hearts of men and render just judgments, He must be omniscient.

The omniscience of God speaks of the absolute fullness of His knowledge about everything that is knowable—a stunning power, even to human geniuses. This trait is made possible in part because of God’s omnipresence. Were He not everywhere all of the time, something might occur where He is not, thus escaping His knowledge. God’s omniscience implies His perfect knowledge not only of things present, but of things past and future as well. In actuality, God does not operate in terms of past, present, or future or in terms of time at all. All things in all ages are ever before the Divine mind in one great panorama. If there is anything whatsoever that He does not know, then He is merely “almost” omniscient, which possibility the doctrine of the Bible does not allow.

The Compassion and Benevolence of God

If we had no more than some of the statements in Proverbs, we could know that God is innately compassionate and benevolent:

Jehovah will root up the house of the proud; But he will establish the border of the widow (15:25).

Rob not the poor, because he is poor; Neither oppress the afflicted in the gate (22:22).

Remove not the ancient landmark; And enter not into the fields of the fatherless: For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their cause against thee (23:10–11).

The poor man and the oppressor meet together; Jehovah lighteneth the eyes of them both (29:13).

God 's compassion is demonstrated in His concern for widows, the poor who are oppressed and afflicted, and the fatherless His. He signals His benevolence in His care for those who have no one else to care for them or who are powerless to plead their own cause. Obviously, the gracious, giving heart of God does not allow Him to delight in the suffering of mankind, including the least esteemed among them. God's benevolent spirit is further seen in certain unconditional gifts He gives. He gives light to the eyes of saint and sinner alike, even as He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Mat. 5:45).

It was this same compassionate and benevolent nature that caused Him to look down upon wicked and lost men and provide a Savior and salvation for them. The Gospel writers frequently describe the compassion our Lord had upon various persons and even multitudes of them. We must ever seek to emulate this wondrous attribute of Deity.

The Justice of God

God's perfect mercy and compassion are balanced by His perfect justice, which receives major emphasis in Proverbs:

Jehovah will root up the house of the proud; But he will establish the border of the widow (15:25).

Jehovah is far from the wicked; But he heareth the prayer of the righteous (v. 29).

All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; But Jehovah weigheth the spirits (16:2).

A just balance and scales are Jehovah's; All the weights of the bag are his work (v. 11).

The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; But Jehovah trieth the hearts (17:3).

Say not thou, I will recompense evil: Wait for Jehovah, and he will save thee (20:22).

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; But Jehovah weigheth the hearts (21:2).

The righteous man considereth the house of the wicked, How the wicked are overthrown to their ruin (21:12).

The eyes of Jehovah preserve him that hath knowledge; But he overthroweth the words of the treacherous man (22:12).

If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not this; Doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his work? (24:12).

For there shall be no reward to the evil man; The lamp of the wicked shall be put out (v. 20).

The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors (26:10, KJV).

Notice the various facets of God's justice: (1) He destroys the proud, but preserves the lowly, (2) He turns away from the wicked, but hears the righteous, (3) He weighs hearts and spirits with just weights, (4) He tries hearts, (5) He recompenses evil, (6) He overthrows the wicked and the treacherous, (7) He renders to all according to their work, (8) He will extinguish the lamp of the wicked, (9) He will reward fools and transgressor according to their sins.

The tendency of men is to emphasize the compassion and benevolence of God and to de-emphasize or even deny the justice of God. However, the same God who gave His Son to save us will also judge all mankind through that Son: "He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). No one will miss the great day of reckoning when God's perfect justice will at last right all wrongs, reveal evil for what it truly is, and banish it forever to eternal Hell: "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Sovereignty and Authority of God

Several statements in Proverbs reflect the sovereignty of God:

Jehovah hath made everything for its own end; Yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (16:4).

The lot is cast into the lap; But the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah (v. 33).

The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; The righteous runneth into it, and is safe (10).

"The horse is prepared against the day of battle; But victory is of Jehovah (21:31).

God's sovereignty is His absolute authority, dominion, and rule. The Bible depicts Him as possessing unrivaled and unquestionable authority. The Father has placed this authority in the hands of His Son, which placement Daniel foresaw:

I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13–14).

The ascension Daniel foretold is the same one Peter described on Pentecost:

This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified (Acts 2:32–36).

He has the Divine right to control all things. There should be dread and fear in this fact for those who live in rebellion to God and His Son. However, the righteous find hope, consolation, and security in God's absolute authority.

The Creative Power of God

Sovereignty and authority belong to Him because He created all things.

The plans of the heart belong to man; But the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah (16:1).

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, Jehovah hath made even both of them (20:12)

The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, Searching all his innermost parts (v. 27).

The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors (26:10, KJV).

There is no rational explanation for the material universe and all of the life that occupies it apart from an omnipotent Creator Who Himself is eternal and never had a beginning. As earlier noted (viz., Psa. 19:1; Rom. 1:20), to this Cause nature is a witness and the Bible testifies on almost every page. Humankind can be very obtuse at times. Many so-called educated people marvel at the fathomless heavens and at the complexity of their own physical bodies. Yet, they blithely say that all of these astounding entities "just happened" by inexplicable and non-reproducible "natural" processes. One simple statement of Scripture provides the logic of the matter: "For every house is builded by some one; but he that built all things is God" (Heb. 3:4).

The Wisdom of God

God's ultimate and perfect wisdom is revealed to some degree in His natural creation. Besides the testimony to God's wisdom that the existence of the material universe implies, the glorious church Jesus established demonstrates "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). However, the fullest revelation of God's wisdom is in His revealed will. The book of Proverbs speaks of the wisdom and truth that abide in Deity alone:

When a man's ways please Jehovah, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace wit him (Pro. 16:7).

A man's heart deviseth his way; But Jehovah directeth his steps (v. 9).

There is no wisdom nor understanding Nor counsel against Jehovah (21:30).

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; But the glory of kings is to search out a matter (25:2).

Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that take refuge in him. Add thou not unto his words, Lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar (30:5–6).

The revealed will of God is so filled with wisdom, that when one lives by it, his righteous life may even silence his enemies. Men ever stray from God, and did we not have the revelation of His will we would be hopeless wanderers in the earth. Jeremiah echoed this principle: “O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). God knew that man was incapable of self-direction, so He gave us the direction we need in His Word. It is fully sufficient to provide very spiritual need that men have:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16–17, KJV).

We need no additional direct help from the Holy Spirit besides the vast sources of strength, wisdom, and fruit-bearing God has given us in His Word. It is quite able to take us to our heavenly home if we will but live by it: “And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which **is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance** among all them that are sanctified” (Acts 20:32, emph. DM).

God’s Word is tried and true. It has stood the test of time; multiple and relentless assaults have attempted to destroy it, but it still stands. We dare not add to it or alter it in any way. The warning John issued concerning the words of his Revelation apply in principle to the entire sacred volume:

I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18–19).

God has revealed His will to us. Let us ever be content to abide by it with never a thought of changing it in any respect.

Conclusion

There are almost countless valuable gems of Truth in the book of Proverbs. Among those gems are the glimpses it gives of the attributes of God. May we learn the attributes well and ever hold them before our eyes in reverence and awe.

Endnote

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

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