

# Foundations I, Part 1: God and His Word

## Starting where the Bible starts: The God who created all things: Genesis 1:1–3

[1] *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. [2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. [3] And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

Without argument or preface, God is spoken of as the Creator in the Bible's first verse. The fact that God is the Creator of the universe is assumed or stated in all the books of the Bible. There is no attempt to offer proof that He exists. He is revealed to us as the only God who exists.

We also learn something about the nature of God's creative activity from the Hebrew word used in Genesis 1:1. The word translated create in the Hebrew word *bara*. This word implies there was no previous existing matter when God created the universe. The verb *bara* is used for creating out of nothing.

## Who is this Creator God?

### God is a Spirit

John 4:24, *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."*

By a spirit we mean, God is an immaterial substance, of a pure, unmixed essence, not compounded of body and soul.

There are two sorts of Spirits, created and finite; as Angels, and the Souls of Men are.

Secondly, Uncreated, and Infinite; and such a Spirit God only is, infinitely above all other Spirits.

### God is Infinite

1 Kings 8:27, *"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!"*

All created beings are finite, but God is infinite. Though infinite may be applied to all God's attributes--he is infinitely merciful, infinitely wise, infinitely holy--yet, her is primarily implies God's omnipresence. The Greek word for 'infinite' signifies 'without bounds or limits.' God is not confined to any place, he is infinite, and so is present in all places at once. His center is everywhere.

### Eternal

Psalm 90:1–2, *"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. [2] Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."*

His eternity. By affirming that God is eternal, we mean that his duration has no limit, and that his existence in infinite duration is absolutely perfect. He could have had no beginning, he can have no end, and in his existence there can be no succession of thoughts, feelings or purposes. There can be no increase to his knowledge, no change as to his purpose. Hence the past and the future must be as immediately and as immutably present with him as the present.

### Unchangeable

James 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."*

God is unchangeable in His nature, perfections, purposes, promises, and gifts. He, being holy, cannot turn to that which is evil; nor can He, who is the fountain of light, be the cause of darkness. Since every good and

perfect gift comes from Him, evil cannot proceed from Him, nor can He tempt any to it. The Bible is clear that God does not change His mind, His will, or His nature.

### **Wisdom**

Psalm 104:24, *“O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”*

When spoken of as an attribute of man, wisdom, while comprehending certain intellectual qualities, gives much more prominence to the moral realm. Taking its rise necessarily in the mind, wisdom attains its fulness only in the depth and purity of the heart. There cannot, indeed, be wisdom where there is no knowledge; but there may be great stores of learning and knowledge where there is a total absence of wisdom. Knowledge often puffs up; wisdom always builds up. And it is wisdom in its purest and noblest human sense that is here applied to God.

### **Power**

Jeremiah 32:17, *“Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.”*

The Power of God is an essential property of his nature, whereby he can do all things that he pleases. The Hebrew word for strong signifies a conquering, prevailing strength. The superlative degree is intended here; meaning...He is most strong. He is called El-shaddai, God almighty (Gen. 17:1)

He has absolutely unlimited power to do whatsoever his nature determines him to will. But this power cannot be directed against his nature.

### **Holiness**

1 Peter 1:15–16, *“But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”*

Sometimes this term is applied to God to express his perfect purity, as in 1 Peter 1:16. In that case it is an element of his perfect righteousness. Sometimes it expresses his majesty, which is the result of all his perfections in one perfection of absolute and infinite excellence: *“And one cried to another, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”* Isa. 6:3.

### **Justice**

Exodus 34:6–7, *“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’”*

God's justice is the quality of his nature, whereby he is carried to the doing of that which is righteous and equal. Justice is to give every one his due. *‘Shall not he render to every man according to his works’* (Prov. 24:12)

God's justice runs in two channels, the distribution of rewards and punishments. He rewards the virtuous and in justice, He punishes offenders.

### **Goodness**

Psalm 103:2–5, *“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, [3] who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, [4] who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, [5] who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”*

The goodness of God is an essential property of his nature, whereby he is absolutely and perfectly good in himself, and the Fountain of all communicated goodness to the creatures. His goodness includes

- (a) Benevolence, or goodness viewed as a disposition to promote the happiness of his sensitive creatures;
- (b) Love, or goodness viewed as a disposition to promote the happiness of his people;

- (c) Mercy, or goodness exercised toward the miserable;
- (d) Grace, or goodness exercised toward the undeserving.

## Truth

Hebrews 6:17–18, “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, [18] so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.”

God is absolutely true. This is a common property of all the divine perfections and actions. His knowledge is absolutely accurate; his wisdom infallible; his goodness and justice perfectly true to the standard of his own nature. In the exercise of all his properties God is always self-consistent. He is also always absolutely true to his creatures in all his communications, sincere in his promises and threatenings, and faithful in their fulfillment.

## Are there more Gods than one? There is only one God, the living and true God.

Deuteronomy 6:4, John 17:3

God is called the living God because he has life in himself and is able to give life and help to others. He is the true God because he really is, whereas other gods exist only in the minds of those who worship them. In Deuteronomy 6:4 God is described by a Hebrew word which means a united one not an only one, and so is perfectly consistent with the truth of personal distinctions within the Divine nature.

## The Names of God

(1) **Elohim:** The plural form of EL, meaning “strong one.” It is especially used of God’s sovereignty, creative work, mighty work for Israel and in relation to His sovereignty (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 45:18).

Compounds of El:

**El Shaddai: “God Almighty.”** Some think it stresses God’s loving supply and comfort; others His power as the Almighty one standing on a mountain and who corrects and chastens (Gen. 17:1).

**El Elyon: “The Most High God.”** Stresses God’s strength, sovereignty, and supremacy (Gen. 14:18-19;).

**El Olam: “The Everlasting God.”** Emphasizes God’s unchangeableness and is connected with His inexhaustibleness (Gen. 16:13).

(2) **Yahweh (YHWH):** Comes from a verb which means “to exist, be.” This, plus its usage, shows that this name stresses God as the independent and self-existent God of revelation and redemption (Gen. 4:3; Ex. 6:3).

Compounds of Yahweh: Strictly speaking, these compounds are designations or titles which reveal additional facts about God’s character.

**Yahweh Jireh (Yireh):** “The Lord will provide.” Stresses God’s provision for His people (Gen. 22:14).

**Yahweh Nissi:** “The Lord is my Banner.” Stresses that God is our rallying point and our means of victory; the one who fights for His people (Ex. 17:15).

**Yahweh Shalom:** “The Lord is Peace.” Points to the Lord as the means of our peace and rest (Jud. 6:24).

**Yahweh Sabaoth:** “The Lord of Hosts.” A military figure portraying the Lord as the commander of the armies of heaven (1 Sam. 17:45).

**Yahweh Maccaddeshcem:** “The Lord your Sanctifier.” Portrays the Lord as our means of sanctification or as the one who sets believers apart for His purposes (Ex. 31:13).

**Yahweh Ro’i:** “The Lord my Shepherd.” Portrays the Lord as the Shepherd who cares for His people as a shepherd cares for the sheep of his pasture (Ps. 23:1).

**Yahweh Tsidkenu:** “The Lord our Righteousness.” Portrays the Lord as the means of our righteousness (Jer. 23:6).

**Yahweh Shammah:** “The Lord is there.” Portrays the Lord’s personal presence in the kingdom (Ezek. 48:35).

**Yahweh Elohim Israel:** “The Lord, the God of Israel.” Identifies Yahweh as the God of Israel in contrast to the false gods of the nations (Judges 5:3).

**(3) Adonai:** Like Elohim, this too is a plural of majesty. The singular form means “master, owner.” Stresses man’s relationship to God as his master, authority, and provider (Gen. 18:1-2).

**(4) Theos:** Greek word translated “God.” Primary name for God used in the New Testament. Its use teaches:

- (1) He is the only true God (Matt. 23:9; Rom. 3:30);
- (2) He is unique (1 Tim. 1:17; John 17:3; Rev. 15:4; 16:7);
- (3) He is transcendent (Acts 17:24; Heb. 3:4; Rev. 10:6);
- (4) He is the Savior (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10). This name is used of Christ as God in John 1:1, 18; 20:28; 1 John 5:20; Tit. 2:13; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1.

**(5) Kurios:** Greek word translated “Lord.” Stresses authority and supremacy. It is used mostly as the equivalent of Yahweh of the Old Testament.

**(6) Father:** A distinctive New Testament revelation is that through faith in Christ, God becomes our personal Father. Father is used of God in the Old Testament only 15 times while it is used of God 245 times in the New Testament. As a name of God, it stresses God’s loving care, provision, discipline, and the way we are to address God in prayer (Matt. 7:11).

## One God or three Gods?

How many persons are there in the Godhead? There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Matthew 3:16-17

John 1:1; Acts 5:3-4

This answer states briefly what is called the doctrine of the Trinity. ‘Trinity’ is not a word found in the Bible, but it is a kind of shorthand in order to describe what the Bible teaches about the Divine nature. There is only one God, but God exists in three persons who live in intimate relationship one to the other.

We use the word persons, not because it is adequate, but because the Bible speaks of the relationship of the three in a manner similar to that which we know between human persons. The Trinity means that God is not lonely, but has a fullness of life and fellowship in himself. When Jesus said, ‘The Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28), he was referring to his position as the Servant of the Lord who had come into this world for our salvation, and not to his own essential equality with the Father (as in John 10:30).

The subject of the Trinity is a great mystery, as we would expect, and there is no adequate illustration of it. God is unique! Three errors could be mentioned.

The first (**Modalism**) teaches that God is but one person, who has played different roles at different times, calling himself successively, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But the Three persons are shown as together at the same time, Matthew 3:16-17.

The second error (**Arianism**), found especially in sects such as ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’, also teaches God is but one person and that Jesus is a created being, and the Holy Spirit merely a name for the power of God.

A third error is **polytheism** (belief in many gods), which is a perversion of the truth of the richness of God’s life. It is found in forms ranging from Mormonism to Hinduism.

# The Bible

## What rule has God given to direct us how to glorify and enjoy him?

The Word of God, which consists of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how to glorify and enjoy him.

Psalm 19:7–11

*[7] The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; [8] the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; [9] the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. [11] Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

2 Timothy 3:16–17

*[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

God has given us definite instructions in writing. As God's book, the Bible is the best book, and we should study it more often than any other. God promises his Holy Spirit to help us understand it. We must never presume to add to it.

The original languages of the Bible are Hebrew (in the Old Testament) and Greek, but common English translations give us the meaning in a form that we can understand.

## Three key qualities of the Bible

### 1. Inspiration: God made use of men to reveal God's word

2 Timothy 3:16–17 is probably the most important single biblical text on the inspiration of Scripture. There we read that the words of Scripture have been breathed out by the lord but not to the exclusion of human instrumentality. In other words, God made use of men in revealing His Word, empowering them to receive His truth and protecting them as they wrote so that they would give us exactly what He wants us to have. Throughout church history, theologians have refrained from going into too much detail about the process by which this inspiration occurred, but they have been fairly clear that apart from a few sections of the bible, the lord did not give us His Word by dictation. Instead, the process has been seen as organic, wherein God does not override the talents, style, vocabulary, or grammar of the author to give us His message. He worked in and through these things to give us a book that is varied in its content and style but unified in its teaching.

### 2. Infallible: Incapable of teaching any error

A second important characteristic of Scripture is its infallibility. To confess that the bible is infallible is to confess that the Scriptures are incapable of teaching any error. Taken in itself, this is a term that strongly presents the perfection of Scripture. The prophets and apostles not only did not err—they could not err when writing Scripture.

### 3. Inerrant: Contains nothing contrary to fact

Finally, there is the inerrancy of Scripture. Inerrancy is a natural outflow of infallibility in the traditional, orthodox sense. Since the authors could not err when writing Scripture, the bible contains no affirmations of anything that is contrary to fact. Inerrancy is a quality of the original text of the bible. Translations may err, but the original manuscripts penned by the prophets and apostles do not.

## The Bible is a unique book

- Written by over 40 men: shepherds, doctors, priests, tentmakers, kings
- It was written over a time period of around 1600 years (~1500BC to ~AD100).
- Parts were written on three different continents (Asia, Europe, & Africa) and in Hebrew and Greek.
- Big Book with 66 smaller books.
- Its influence on our world and on many people's lives has been tremendous. It's the most translated book ever. Portions translated in over 2,000 languages
- A living document with power to change the reader. The Author is alive and meets us as we read.

## **The Bible is magnificent book.**

Early twentieth-century evangelist Billy Sunday pictured the Bible like a majestic palace. He wrote, I entered through the portico of Genesis and walked down through the Old Testament's art gallery, where I saw the portraits of Joseph, Jacob, Daniel, Moses, Isaiah, Solomon and David hanging on the wall; I entered the music room of the Psalms and the Spirit of God struck the keyboard of my nature until it seemed to me that every reed and pipe in God's great organ of nature responded to the harp of David, and the charm of King Solomon in his moods.

I walked into the business house of Proverbs. I walked into the observatory of the prophets and there saw photographs of various sizes, some pointing to far-off stars or events—all concentrated upon one great Star which was to rise as an atonement for sin.

Then I went into the audience room of the King of Kings, and got a vision from four points—from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I went into the correspondence room, and saw Peter, James, Paul and Jude, penning their epistles to the world. I went into the Acts of the Apostles and saw the Holy Spirit forming the Holy Church, and then I walked into the throne room and saw a door at the foot of a tower and, going up, I saw One standing there, fair as the morning, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and I found this truest friend that man ever knew; when all were false I found him true (Billy Sunday Speaks [New York: Chelsea House, 1970], p. 23).

However, we don't want merely to admire it; we need to understand it.

J.I. Packer, Canadian Christian theologian

“If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible. Knowing that it is the Word of God, teaching people to know and love and serve the God of the Word, I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges and traps, to frighten people off. With smug conceit, no doubt, as if receiving a compliment, I should acknowledge that wise old Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) had me absolutely pegged when he wrote:

*The devil never would attempt to beget in persons a regard to that divine word which God has given to be the great and standing rule. . . . Would the spirit of error, in order to deceive men, beget in them a high opinion of the infallible rule, and incline them to think much of it, and be very conversant with it? . . . The devil has ever shown a mortal spite and hatred towards that holy book the Bible: he has done all in his power to extinguish that light. . . . He is engaged against the Bible, and hates every word in it.”*

Packer continues, “If I were the Devil, I should labor every day to prove Edwards's words true.

How? Well, I should try to distract all clergy from preaching and teaching the Bible, and spread the feeling that to study this ancient book directly is a burdensome extra that modern Christians can forgo without loss. I should broadcast doubts about the truth and relevance and good sense and straightforwardness of the Bible, and if any still insisted on reading it I should lure them into assuming that the benefit of the practice lies in the noble and tranquil feelings evoked by it rather than in noting what Scripture actually says. At all costs I should want to keep them from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of its message.”

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God is Infinite	1 Kings 8:27
Eternal	Psalms 90:1–2
Unchangeable	James 1:17
Wisdom	Psalms 104:24
Power	Jeremiah 32:17
Holiness	1 Peter 1:15–16
Justice	Exodus 34:6–7
Goodness	Psalms 103:2–5
Truth	Hebrews 6:17–18

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