

Bite Size Bible Study

God's Attributes #240

By Lee Logue

I often study the Bible looking for God's Attributes and Character. I used to try imaging what He looks like but eventually concluded that whatever I envisioned would not even come close to His real image. So now I look for how He lives and acts. In some ways this is easier because He tells us and shows us in Bible Stories who He really is and how He responds to humankind.

One of these stories in Exodus 34:6-7, has for some time given me a partial image of His character. These verses constitute God's response to Moses' two requests. One, that he comprehends God's ways (33:13) and Two, that he could witness His presence (33:18). So, as God passes before Moses, he gets the answer to both. God's self-disclosure of His moral qualities provides the essence of His character and to understand them is to achieve a higher understanding of God. Our purpose is to begin to imitate God's moral qualities of compassion, graciousness, forbearance, kindness, faithfulness, and forgiveness.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7 NIV

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. Exodus 34:6-7 KJV

Because there are many different translations of the Hebrew words, I have color coded the words that relate to the same Hebrew word from **NIV in blue** and **KJV in red**. Hebrew words in **Green**

Attributes of God

In Jewish tradition these verses are called the Attributes of God. Emphasis and priority are given to God's magnanimous qualities rather than to His judgmental actions.

Lord LORD (YHVH), Lord LORD (YHVH)

This repetition is explained in the Talmud as meaning, "I am the merciful God before a man commits a sin, and I am the same merciful and forgiving God after a man has sinned." By this they understood that God does not change and that He is God whether the people sin or not. God does not change, but mankind changes.

God God – Heb *El*

Meaning strength, mighty, all-powerful: especially the Almighty One: Lord of the Universe, Ruler of nature and mankind.

Compassionate merciful – Heb *rahûm*

The root word r-ḥ-m is related to the Hebrew word for "womb" (*reḥem*), which evokes images of nurturing, deep love and protection. Significance of the term *rahûm* underscores the depth of God's love and mercy, emphasizing that these are not merely occasional acts but fundamental aspects of His character. It highlights God's willingness to forgive and restore, providing for hope and repentance, and showing that He is full of affectionate sympathy for the sufferings and miseries of human condition.

Gracious gracious – Heb *ḥannûn*

Meaning assisting, helping, and consoling the afflicted and raising up those who are oppressed. In humans these qualities manifest themselves sporadically and temporarily. It is not so with God: in Him, compassion and grace are permanent, inherent within His nature. Therefore, He alone can be spoken of as merciful and gracious (*rahûm ve ḥannûn*).

Slow to anger longsuffering – Heb *erekh apayim*

Erekh apayim derives from a Hebrew idiom meaning "slow of nostrils" or "long nose". The idiom comes from the idea that when one becomes angry their nose often flairs. The opposite then implies patience, meaning that God is not quick or impatient to punish the sinner but gives them opportunities to consider their evil deeds and change the course of their lives.

Abounding in love abundant in goodness – Heb *rav ḥesed*

Meaning, overflowing in mercy. Granting His gifts and blessings beyond the rewards that one deserves.

Faithfulness truth – Heb *'emet*

'Emet, usually translated "truth," encompasses reliability, durability, and faithfulness. It expresses God's absolute and eternal dependability in His love and concern for each of His children and His plans for the salvation of all of humanity.

Hesed, Often called lovingkindness, unending love or Godly love. It is faithful, loyal, reliable and based on action and not feelings.

Hesed and emet are often seen together in scripture, from this we might imply "Speak the truth by all means; but be quite sure to speak the truth in love."

Love to thousands mercy for thousands –

Heb *notzer hesed la-alafim*

Maintaining lovingkindness and mercy for a thousand generations (meaning for a very long time). Recalling the

good deeds of the ancestors from a thousand generations, and passing forward those rewards to their descendants.

The phrase may express either God's continuous and unchanging *hesed*, or the idea that the merit for the *hesed* that people perform endures beyond their own generation.

Forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin
Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin
Forgiving in Heb *nāsā'*

Bearing with indulgence the failings of man, and by forgiveness restoring him to their original purity.

Three words for wrongdoing

1. *wickedness iniquity* Heb *avon*
The sins committed from evil disposition by perverting God's ways.
2. *rebellion transgression* Heb *pesha*
Sins committed in rebellion against God. Evil deeds springing from malice and rebellion against God.
3. *sin sin* Heb. *chattaah*
An offence primarily by missing the mark. Also, shortcomings due to not paying attention to God's teaching (Torah). Likewise, it can also mean sins made by mistake.

Guilty unpunished clear the guilty Heb *nāqā*
He will not allow the guilty to pass unpunished. He is merciful and gracious and forgiving; but He will never obliterate the eternal and unbridgeable distinction between right and wrong, between good and evil. God cannot leave repeated wickedness and obstinate persistence in evil entirely unpunished.

punishes the children visiting the iniquity Heb *pāqāq*
Allowing the consequences of the parent's sin to fall on the children is a secondary effect on the parents. Parents generally do not wish to see their children punished for their sin. This relates only to the consequences of the sin not eventual forgiveness and reconciliation.

The misdeeds are visited only to the third and fourth generation (a short time), whereas His love is continuing for a thousand generations (a very long time).

Summery

To Summarize all the above, I will try to write what these verses mean to me.

God says: "I am the merciful God before someone commits a sin, and I am the same merciful and forgiving God after someone has sinned. I do not change whether people sin or not. I am the Almighty One: Lord of the Universe, Ruler of all nature and all mankind."

I am eternally full of affectionate sympathy for the sufferings and miseries of your human condition, and willing to forgive and restore you. I provide hope and the path to repentance. My compassion and grace are permanent, inherent within My nature.

I am not quick or impatient to punish any sinner but I provide time and conditions for them to consider their sins and change the course of their lives.

In My mercy for you, I provide gifts and blessings beyond what anyone deserves. I am eternally dependable in My love and concern for each of My children. My plan for the salvation of each of them is immutable.

My love and mercy extend beyond eternity. In that love, I even provide you with the blessings that your ancestors deserved through their good deeds.

I tolerate your failings and offences, but I will not allow them to go scot-free. Your wicked and immoral ways of dealing with others, rebelling against Me and not paying attention to the instructions I have given you, have consequences and I will not remove them.

My goodness will not override my justice. The one who sins will suffer the consequences of that sin. The consequences of these sins are there to help the sinner to understand that there are repercussions in doing wrong. These punishments are not vindictive, but corrective and educative in restoring the sinner to a proper way of living.

These misdeeds may be felt by your children, grandchildren, even to your great-great-grandchildren but this is only for a short time, compared to My love for all of those affected and continues beyond eternity. I will not leave you, even when you are suffering the consequences of your sins.

If you have a different summery,
I would love to read it – email it to me at
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