

Lesson 6

Part One – Introduction to Systematic Theology

- I. Introduction
 - a. What is Systematic Theology?
 - b. What is the relation between Systematic Theology and Hermeneutics?
 - c. Why is it important to study the Bible systematically?

Part Two – Theology Proper - Beginning at the Beginning

- I. Introduction to the One True God
 - a. Arguments for the existence of God
 - b. Why only one God
- II. The Nature of God
 - a. God's incommunicable perfections (attributes)
 - b. God's *communicable* attributes
 - i. Spirituality
 - ii. Intellect (includes knowledge, wisdom, and veracity)
 - iii. Morality (includes goodness, love, grace, mercy and longsuffering)
 - iv. Holiness
 - v. Righteousness
 - vi. Justice
 - c. God as Trinity
 - i. Definition
 - ii. Misinterpretations/Misunderstandings
 - iii. Explanation
 - iv. Difficulties
- III. The Decree of God
 - a. Definition
 - b. Characteristics of God's Decree
 - c. Order of God's Decrees
- IV. The Names of God

There are basically three designations for God in the Old Testament: Elohim, Adonai, and Yahweh. There are other names used for God as well but they are generally compound words made up of these words plus other descriptive words.

- a. **Elohim** – Elohim is a Hebrew plural form and is used over 2,000 times in the Old Testament. It's sometimes referred to as the "*plural of majesty*." If you're not familiar with that term, it wasn't uncommon for kings in times past to speak on behalf of themselves using the plurals "*we*" and "*our*." The implications of our understanding of this are enormous. Consider **Genesis 1:26**, for example. When God said, "*Let us make man in our own image,*" was He simply using the "*plural of majesty*" or was there some sort of Trinitarian dialogue taking place? Well, as Albert Barnes and others point out, the use of the "*plural of majesty*" was simply not the common style of monarchs in the ancient East. Pharaoh, for example, says in **Genesis 41:15**, "*I have dreamed a dream.*" Nebuchadnezzar, in **Daniel 2:3**, said "*I have dreamed.*" Darius the Mede, in **Daniel 6:26**, said "*I make a decree.*" Cyrus, in **Ezra 5:8**, said "*The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth.*" Since we don't see the "*plural of majesty*" used among the kings in the ancient East, we cannot arbitrarily ascribe the use of it to Moses in the first chapter of Genesis.

So, what was going on here? Well, the word Elohim comes from the abbreviated name, El, which probably means "*to be strong or preeminent*" but is translated as "God" in our English translations. Elohim is simply the plural form of El. Given what we can glean elsewhere in Scripture concerning the nature of God, what we understand then is that God is expressing Himself as a **triune** God.

NOTE: From the earliest days (we assume since the time of Abraham's father, Terah), the people of God have been monotheistic and have referred to God as "*Ha Elohim.*" Translated, this means "*the One True God who exists as a plurality.*" This is also reflected in the Jewish call to worship known as the "Shema" which, when translated says, "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One.*"

- b. **Adonai** – The designation Adonai means "*lord*" or "*master*" and is usually translated "*Lord*" in English Bibles. Adonai occurs some 449 times in the Old Testament and 315 times in conjunction with Yahweh. This designation is used primarily to indicate the servant-master relationship that God has with His people and indicates that He is sovereign in His rule and authority over all things. As a matter of fact, Adonai is best translated as "*Lord of all*" or "*Lord over all.*" It is also perfectly acceptable to understand Adonai as a personal address meaning "*my Lord.*"

- c. **Yahweh** – The name Yahweh comes from the Hebrew four-lettered expression (also known as a tetragrammaton) YHWH. Because the name was originally written without vowels, we can't be sure how it is supposed to be pronounced. Jews have been taught to believe that the covenant name of God is simply too holy; too sacred to be written by any mere mortal so they left the vowels out. Many today still make this a practice, spelling God "G-d."

The word Yahweh is used nearly 7,000 times in the Old Testament and finds its New Testament equivalent in the transliterated designation "*Jehovah*" (Y=J, H, W=V, H). Yahweh was a name used exclusively by the Jewish people and indicates God's personal relationship with all of His people. There are numerous compound terms that use Yahweh as a means of showing this: *Yahweh (or Jehovah) Jireh* (the Lord will provide), *Jehovah-Nissi* (the Lord our banner), *Jehovah-Shalom* (the Lord is Peace), *Jehovah-Sabaoth* (the Lord of Hosts), and *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* (the Lord our Righteousness).

V. God's Works of Creation and Providence

- a. **Creation** – God created everything that is, through the agency of the Son, *ex nihilo*, that is, "*from nothing came everything.*" The scientific mind is incapable of coming to grips with this because they have determined that it is impossible for anything to come from nothing. We accept on the basis of faith that God's supernatural creation of all that is perfectly corresponds to His nature as the only eternal One in all creation. Simply put, matter is not eternal.

There are those who believe in what is called "*the gap theory*" which postulates that the word "*was*" in **Genesis 1:2**, "*The earth was formless and void...*" should actually be translated as "*became.*" This allows for the idea that matter is somehow eternal and that God created using existing materials. What the word actually means, however, is that in the beginning the earth was formless and void! Contrary to the thinking of some, this does NOT imply chaos but simply indicates that God first created matter before constructing it into its current configuration.

God created everything in six literal days. There are many who argue this point, I suspect, based on their own limitations in duplicating the feat, but the Scriptural evidence is quite clear.

As Robert Reymond states, *“The word “day” (Hebrew ‘yom’), in the singular, dual, and plural, occurs some 2,225 times in the Old Testament with the overwhelming preponderance of these occurrences designating the ordinary daily cycle. Normally the preponderance meaning of a term should be maintained unless contextual considerations force one to another view. As R. L. Dabney states with respect to the word “yom,” in **Genesis 1**: ‘The narrative seems historical, and not symbolical; and hence the strong initial presumption is, that all its parts are to be taken in their obvious sense...The natural day is [yom’s] literal and primary meaning.’ We also note the recurring phrase, “and the evening and the morning constituted one day.” This is further proof that creation took place in a literal six day period. Finally, we must consider the fact that, in each of the 476 other cases in the Old Testament where “yom” is modified by a specific number, it ALWAYS refers to a normal, literal day.*

- b. **Providence** – According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, *“God the Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”*

God’s providence can be subdivided into two categories: His **ordinary** works of providence and his **special** works of providence. Regardless of whether we are talking about God’s ordinary works or His special works, we must never separate them from Christ’s involvement in them. As Reymond observes, *“...all of God’s dealings with his creation are mediated through the Christ.”*

The term *“ordinary”* refers to those things that God provides to every one and everything He has created (see **Psalm 145:9-17**). Look also at **Matthew 5:45** and **Acts 14:17**. This ordinary providence doesn’t only apply to man. See **Psalm 104:10-30** and **Matthew 6:25-34**. Even these works of ordinary providence are for the benefit of those who love God. A correct rendering of **Romans 8:28** makes this point: *“In all things [his general providence] God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose [which is an act of His special providence].”*

I’m actually going to wait until we get to our section on Soteriology before we look at God’s special providence so stay tuned for that.

Until then, just remember that everything that happens to you happens as a result of God's divine providence. I'm reminded of the connection R.C. Sproul makes with regard to how providence works. He uses the account of Joseph's life to illustrate it perfectly. Joseph, you'll recall, went through the unimaginable agony of having been separated from his family at a young age, being sold into slavery to a caravan of Midianite camel herders, and having to live his life knowing that his father had given him up for dead. For most of us, this would have been unbearable. And yet, in the final analysis, it all became crystal clear to him as he told his brothers who had come to him during the famine, "*What you intended for evil, God meant for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive...*" God's providence is always intended to bring about what is best for His children.

Part Three – Christology: The Doctrine of Christ

I. The Pre-existence and Eternality of Christ

"The eternality and deity of Christ are inseparably linked together. Those who deny His eternality also deny His deity. If the deity of Christ is established, there is no problem in accepting His eternality."

- a. **Direct Proof** – There are numerous passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament which explicitly affirm the eternality of Jesus Christ.
 - i. **Micah 5:2.** This statement emphasizes that "*His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.*" Although He was born in Bethlehem (prophesied from this verse), that was not His beginning; He has existed "*from the days of eternity.*"
 - ii. **John 1:1.** The word "*was*" in the phrase, "*In the beginning was the Word,*" is the Greek *hen*, the imperfect tense that stresses continual existence in past time. The phrase could be translated, "*In the beginning the Word was continually existing.*"
 - iii. **John 8:58.** Although Abraham lived 2,000 years before Christ, He could say, "*before Abraham was born, I am.*"

Although He was born in Bethlehem, Jesus claimed to have existed before Abraham. Notice Jesus' use of the phrase, "*I am*" here as well.

This is not only a claim to support his eternity, it's a direct reference to His equality with Yahweh.

iv. **Hebrews 1:8.** In **verse 8** of this passage, we see God the Father speaking to the Son saying, *“Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.”* This is also a reference to both Jesus' eternity and His deity.

v. **Colossians 1:17.** Paul states here that Jesus *“is before all things,”* stressing His eternity and pre-existence.

b. **Indirect Proof** – Other passages suggest *indirectly* that Jesus is eternal and pre-existent.

i. **Christ's heavenly origin proves His eternal existence.** **John 3:13** stresses that Christ *“descended from heaven.”* If Christ came down from heaven then Bethlehem cannot have been His beginning. See **John 6:38** as well.

ii. **Christ's pre-incarnate work proves His eternal existence.** **John 1:3** tells us that Christ created all things. If He created all things then He must be eternal (cf. **1 Corinthians 8:6**).

iii. **Theophanies prove His eternal existence.** A theophany is defined as, *“an appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity in human form.”* The One who is called *“LORD”* or *“Yahweh”* (Jehovah), in **Genesis 18**, is to be understood as the Second Person of the Trinity. The identification of Christ with the appearances of the angel of the Lord (the Theophany) can be demonstrated in the following way: The angel of the Lord is recognized as deity. He is referred to as God (**Judges 6:11, 14**; note in **verse 11** He is called *“angel of the Lord,”* while in **verse 14** He is called *“Lord”*). The angel of the Lord couldn't have been the Holy Spirit or the Father because neither of them have ever appeared in physical form (see **John 1:18**).

Another clue is that there is no mention of the angel of the Lord in the New Testament; He ceases to appear after the birth of Christ.

Next Time: In our next time together, we'll look at the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ.