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The Attributes of God demonstrated in the book of Exodus

Throughout the book of Exodus, God has demonstrated many of his characteristics and revealed his attributes by his miracles, judgments, and encounters with both the people of Israel and the Egyptians. These attributes include God's holiness, his righteousness as a judge, his mercy, and his transcendence. This act of revelation established a reputation and set the standard for understanding the character of Yhwh the one true God.

As a principle of God's nature, the first characteristic that is revealed is the reality of his holiness. In particular, in the book of Exodus, the holiness of God is conveyed very early in the narrative. In Exodus chapter 3, God confronts Moses by attracting him towards a supernatural act of a bush that burned indefinitely without decay. This image itself is a symbol of the holiness of God. The burning bush illustrates how God himself is not subject to the laws of nature and therefore is something so different than anything in the natural world, he is separate. Upon approaching the scene, God tells Moses "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground" (Exod. 3:5 NKJV). God in this statement is teaching something about himself within the first few moments of this encounter. Moses is being taught that this being who is calling out to him is not only worthy of reverence but is so separate from who he is that he is not even to "come near". After Moses witnesses the hand of God and is

wholly convinced of the truth of Yhwh's words, he recognizes the fact that God is holy by stating in the Song of Deliverance "Who *is* like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness" (Exod. 15:11 NKJV). In this song he is stating a rhetorical question, *Mi khamokha* "who is like you?" not asking for the sake of inquiry but to convey his sense of recognition. He is stating that in reality there is none like Yhwh, he is different than any other concept, a false idol, and any machination of man that can be conjured up. The epitome of God's holiness is evident in his personal self-revelation to Moses. God in his encounter with Moses through the burning bush reveals his holy nature by stating his identity and his name. When Moses asks God who he is, God responds by telling him *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14). In the Hebrew, the phrase is debated amongst scholars with regards to the specific details concerning its semantical context. The word *Ehyeh* is itself the first person imperfect form of the verb "to be" or "become". Some scholars debate the temporal context of this statement as Hebrew verbs lack intrinsic temporality. The semantic range of this phrase can be "I am" to "I will be" or "I will become". However, we can look to ancient commentaries and translations of this verse to narrow down the meaning of this phrase. In the translated passage in Targum Pseudo Jonatha, which is more of a dynamically interpretive translation than others such as Onkelos, this statement is translated as "who was and will be". It is also preceded by the phrase "who spoke and the world was". This idea of being an entity not only preceding time but being unaffected by it is also clearly apparent in the Septuagint's rendering of the verse as "*Ego eimi o on*" "I am the being". Thus it is clear that the context is not about God's economic interaction with man as being perpetually the same, but is clearly defining the nature of God ontologically, with respect to his personhood apart from creation. He is a transcendent being that

existed before and outside of the laws concerning the dimensions of space and time. We see in these passages that Yhwh is apart from his creation spiritually, dimensionally, and ontologically. The holiness of God is a key element that sets the stage for the interactions he has with man, in particular his judgments.

God being holy from his creation extends into the issues of justice. Since God is holy he is morally different from us, he is just and righteous. God's characteristic of being a righteous judge pervades the entirety of the Torah, especially the book of Exodus. His righteousness is seen at the scene of his revelation to Moses in his command to liberate his people from Egypt. However, we see that the sinful heart of Man tries to oppose the will of God. Pharaoh in his depravity rejects God's command, and in doing so incurs the wrath and judgment of God. God knows this and tells Moses during his first encounter that "So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go" (Exod. 3:20 NKJV). He tells Moses that he will send forth his judgment on the people of Egypt. The phrase "stretch out my hand" was tantamount to "judgment". In Exod. 7:4 we see a clear description of God sending judgment in which he states that he would use *mishfatim* "judgments" to deliver Israel out of Egypt. God then sends 9 plagues, and then sends the last one which was the most severe of them all. The last plague was the slaying of the firstborn, by an angel sent by God. This act of judgment extended to both man and animal alike. Every living thing was subject to the plague. This act is rooted in his holiness, and therefore shows the level by which God judges transgressors, to the point of indiscriminate destruction. However, through this event, God displays his mercy and grace through the escape of the Passover lamb.

God displays his act of mercy throughout the book of Exodus, manifesting in his acknowledgment of the cries of Israel, his provisions during their later desert journeying and is exemplified through the sparing of Israel through Passover rite. In his meeting with Moses at Sinai through the burning bush, God tells Moses that he heard the cries of the Israelites and that he would give them a prosperous fruitful land (Exod. 3:7-9). The act of God intervening and stepping in to save Israel is in itself a merciful, gracious act, because while they were victims, they were also sinners before his sight and in his holiness had every right to cast judgment. However, God is more than just a righteous judge. Yhwh is a forgiving, merciful and gracious God, and we see this demonstrated in him sparing Israel from the judgment of the firstborn. God sovereignly decided to destroy a selection of sinners indiscriminate to their class and race. He did not need to spare anyone, but he did. He provided protection from this through the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts of a house (Exod. 12:23). This itself would later be understood as a typological image of the ultimate salvation of God as accomplished in Jesus Christ.

The first twenty chapters of Exodus contain many instances that reveal God's characteristics and attributes. They reveal his holiness, his righteousness, and mercy, working both to glorify himself and to save his creation. In the book of Exodus, God demonstrated his attributes both to reveal who he is and to apply that to us in the economy of salvation.