

God

The Old Testament.

In the Old Testament the plural form *elohim* became the favored generic term for God. This development is lost in obscurity, but the evidence from ancient literature contemporary with the Old Testament attests to the use of the plural form in other cultures around Israel as the designation of a single deity that embodies the entirety of divine life. Some have taken the plural form as a plural of intensity, representing the indescribable, or as an abstract plural, corresponding to our words "Godhead" or "divinity," and there is justification for both views.

Precisely when and why the Israelites took this title for their God, rather than the singular *el* [lea] or *eloh*, is not known. However, based on the Book of Genesis and the story of the revelation of the divine name in Exodus 3:14, we suspect that *elohim*, along with other terms, was widely used by the Israelites from the earliest times as a designation for God.

In the course of time, however, God revealed his distinctive divine name, *Yahweh*, by which Israel should know him. This name, according to Genesis 4:26, was known in the pre-patriarchal era, but Exodus 3:14 leads us to the conclusion that it assumed a new and more distinctive meaning in the Mosaic era.

As a general rule, the literary context has a great deal to do with which of the terms (*Elohim* or *Yahweh*) the text used to designate Israel's God. *Elohim* [seems more appropriate for contexts that require a universal view of the deity, or contexts that connote his power and omnipotence, while *Yahweh* may be more appropriate for those contexts that deal with Israel and Israel's historical experience, or the deity's personal presence and involvement in Israel and the world.

For example, the creation narrative of Genesis 1 employs *Elohim* since the creation of the universe is in view and God is acting in his sovereign role, but the parallel narrative of Genesis 2 introduces the dual name *Yahweh God* (Lord God), in view of *Yahweh*'s personal involvement in the creation of man and woman.

God as Creator.

It is significant that the first impression of God the Bible gives is God as Creator of the heavens and earth ([Gen 1:1](#)). The phrase "heavens and earth" is a merism, which means that everything in the universe as we know it was created by God.

The Bible makes no attempt to prove that God exists. Rather, the universe is the affidavit of his existence. Moreover, the fact that he is the Creator means that the world belongs to him. So when God offers Abraham the land of Canaan, it is his right to give it because he created the world.

The gods of Canaan represented natural forces; there was no clear dividing line between nature and the divine. On the other hand, the creation narratives of Genesis 1-2, which are best understood as depicting twenty-four-hour days, establish the theological premise that God is distinct from nature, that he brought nature into existence, and that he controls nature.

In addition to being God's supreme witnesses in the world, human beings are also his representatives to bring the natural world into the service of God ("Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground," [Gen 1:28](#)). Thus the God of the Old Testament is from the beginning the God who stands apart from nature

and rules over it. As the story of the Old Testament unfolds, it is appropriate to describe him as the God of history.

The creation narrative puts forward what is perhaps, along with the doctrine of the incarnation in the New Testament, the most remarkable concept for making God known in all of Scripture, the image of God ([Gen 1:26-27](#) ; [9:6](#)). This distinctive of creation meant that God related to humankind personally and imparted something of his own nature to his creation. While the history of interpretation has offered no unanimity on the meaning of this phrase, the most satisfactory explanation is a comprehensive one. The image of God implies all that is distinctive to human nature: the spiritual, psychological, sociological, and physical aspects, all of which are reflections of God's nature.

The spiritual implies that human beings are made to relate to their Creator; the psychological, that they are reasoning and emotional creatures; the sociological, that they are created to relate to one another; and the physical, that man's corporal form reflects an essential aspect of God's not in the sense that he has a body, but in the sense that his being is multifaceted and multifunctional. He speaks, sees, hears, and walks, for example, without requiring the physical organs that human beings must have to enable these activities.

The ultimate expression of this attribute of God's being is his incarnation in human flesh. So the image of God is not limited to one aspect of human nature, like the mind or the spirit, but is comprehensive. Therefore, when God created man in his image, he left the indelible stamp of his nature on human beings. They were not divine, but reflected the nature of the deity.

The view of God as personal is grounded in the image of God. He is a self-conscious being, who has will and purpose. The parallel creation narrative of Genesis 2:4b-25 further communicates this view of God as personal in anthropomorphic terms as he forms man from the dust of the ground, breathes the breath of life into his nostrils, makes the birds and beasts of the field, fashions woman from the man, and finally plants a garden for their habitat in Eden.

This initial portrait of God, therefore, invests the biblical story with a view of God who is personal. Regardless of whether the creation narrative is early or late in its composition, its canonical position in the Old Testament gives it anterior advantage, and the biblical reader proceeds through the Old Testament with this view of the Creator God who was personally involved in the world he created.

So one is not surprised to find him walking in the garden, addressing Adam and Eve, laying out plans to save a morally debased world, covenanting with Abraham, intervening on Moriah to spare Isaac's life, speaking to Jacob in a dream, and preserving Joseph in a foreign and hostile environment in order to procure his will for the people he had chosen to bear his name in the world.

God of the Fathers.

With the introduction of the patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), God became known as the "God Almighty, " El Shaddai ([Gen 17:1](#) ; [28:3](#) ; [35:11](#) ; [48:3](#) ; [49:25](#) ; [Exod 6:3](#) ; [Ezek 10:5](#)), and less frequently "God everlasting" (El Olam), "God of seeing" (El Roi), and "God most high, " El Elyon ([Gen 21:33](#) ; [16:13](#)). The latter two terms arise out of specific historical situations and suggest something about God's involvement in the lives of his people.

The name of God is personalized in the general title "God of your fathers, " referring to the patriarchs ([Exod 3:13-16](#) ; [Deuteronomy 1:11](#) [Deuteronomy 1:21](#) ; [4:1](#) ; [6:3](#) ; [12:1](#) ; [27:3](#) ; [Joshua 18:3](#) , etc.). He is also called the "Shield of Abraham" ([Gen 15:1](#)), the "Kinsman of Isaac" ([Genesis 31:42](#) [Genesis 31:53](#)), and the "Mighty One of Jacob" ([Gen 49:24](#)). As a rule, the Canaanite deities were named by the place where they were worshiped, but in this personal form, the God of the patriarchs is revealed as an omnipresent God who is involved in history and the lives of those whom he chooses.

God of Israel's National Events.

The Exodus. Perhaps the single most important era for the shaping of Israel's God-concept, despite the opinions of the historical critics, was the Mosaic era, and no text is more important in this regard than Exodus 3:14, where God identifies himself to Moses as I am who I am. This text stands alongside Genesis 1:27 in theological importance.

Its complementary text is Exodus 6:2-9. Numerous explanations have been offered for this enigmatic statement. The key word is the verb "to be" occurring here in the imperfect form (lit. I will be who I will be), but the Hebrew imperfect verb can bear both the future and the present senses ("I am who I am"). The shortened form of the name occurs at the end of the sentence, "I am has sent me to you." And Exodus 3:15 equates I am with the God of the fathers: "The Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you."

The most satisfactory explanation of this name is one that grows out of the context. Recognizing this, Walter Eichrodt suggested that its significance lies in the promise of God's presence. When Moses objected to Yahweh's plan that he should go to Pharaoh, Yahweh said, "I will be with you" ([Exod 3:12](#)). This meaning not only takes seriously the immediate context, but the larger context of the Old Testament as well. Yahweh (the vocalization of the name is the contribution of modern scholars) will be with the Israelites.

This promise of God's presence became a crucial factor during the Mosaic era and was the point of contention in Exodus 33, when Yahweh responded to the golden calf episode by first declaring that his presence would not accompany Israel into Canaan. Moses thereupon pleaded with God to go personally with them, or otherwise not take them into Canaan at all. God acceded to this request and promised his personal presence. This promise of divine presence with Israel reaches its summit in the Old Testament text of Isaiah 7:14, when God promises that a child would be born and that his name would be Immanuel, which means "God is with us."

The sum of the matter is that God or Yahweh is a God who is present with his people, present in the world he made, present in peace and war, present in crisis and serenity, especially present in the soon-occurring exodus from Egypt toward which Exodus 3:14 is pointing.

God as the saving God can be seen on a universal scale in the story of the flood (Gen. 6-9), and on a personal scale in the stories of the patriarchs (Gen. 12-50). This notion of God is raised to a national level in the exodus from Egypt, a narrative for which the Joseph story serves as an appropriate transition from the view of God as personal Savior to national Savior.

God's saving Israel from Egypt becomes the paradigm of saving in the Old Testament, so that when Israel faces the national crisis of exile to Babylonia, the imagery of God's saving Israel from Egypt is the standard with which the return to Judea is compared.

In the historical books, God as the saving God delivers his people from national oppression and humiliation, and in the psalms, delivers Israel and individuals from personal danger, sickness, and other threatening circumstances. While God's saving action in the Old Testament is largely set in time and space, it is the foundation on which the New Testament builds the doctrine of eternal salvation that transcends time and space. Further, already in the Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah ([Isa 52:13-53:12](#)), God's saving action becomes passive suffering and thus forms a link between the Old Testament view of God and the New Testament view of the suffering Messiah.

Sinai. What God had done on behalf of the patriarchs, he had done on Israel's behalf. Sinai was a summing up of his work that preceded it and that aimed to make Israel Yahweh's special people and shape them into a community loyal to him.

God began this work when he created the world, and continued it in his work of grace executed in the lives of the heroes and heroines of faith, like Enoch who walked with God ([Genesis 5:22](#) [Genesis 5:24](#)), Noah who found favor in the eyes of the Lord ([Gen 6:8](#)), Abraham whose faith God counted as righteousness ([Gen 15:6](#)), and Joseph whom God sustained in Egypt through adversity and success ([Gen 39:23](#)). Sinai was the place where God revealed himself to Israel.

This revelation took the form of Torah (law). The reconciling work God had engaged in since the fall ([Gen 3](#)) assumed institutional status in the Torah. God instituted an agent (priesthood) to serve as an intermediary of reconciliation between himself and Israel, a place (tabernacle) where he and Israel should meet each other in worship, and a means (sacrificial system) that provided the formal expression of Israel's and the individual's desire to do God's will and to live in obedience to his commandments.

While the Torah was the broad revelation of God's will and Israel's responsibility toward God, God put his signature on the Torah in a more formal arrangement called a covenant (berit [[tyir.B](#)]). The covenant he made with Abraham was activated on a national level at Sinai and designed with particulars that formalized the relationship between Israel and Yahweh. Not only did God commit himself to Israel, but he called Israel to a binding commitment to him.

In this covenant, God established the theological premise of his oneness: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" ([Deut 6:4](#)). While this premise distinguishes him from the pluralistic notion of deity so common in the ancient Near East, it also makes a statement about his inner unity, involving his unity of both person and purpose.

Although the Old Testament can speak of God in plural terms (e.g., "let us make man in our image, " [Gen 1:26](#)), his plurality of inner being, perhaps indicative of the interactive and complex nature of his person, functions with a unity of purpose. He should not be conceived of, therefore, like the ancient pantheon of gods and goddesses who sometimes worked against one another's purposes. Rather, he is one in person and purpose.

Thus, Israel was called to worship God with a singleness of devotion, giving their loyalty to him and to no other gods ([Exod 20:3-6](#)). The prophets later helped Israel understand that this undivided loyalty was in fact directed to the only God who existed (e.g., [Isa 45:5](#)). The other gods were mere figments of the imagination.

The Sinai covenant had a dual purpose, stipulating how God would relate to Israel and how Israel should relate to God and the world. The same vocabulary that describes God in the Old Testament is used to call Israel to covenant loyalty.

For example, God calls Israel to be holy premised on his being holy: "Be holy, for I am holy" ([Lev 11:44-45](#) ; [19:2](#) ;[20:26](#) ; [21:8](#)). The Sinai legislation provides no more distinctive concept of God than God as holy. This character of God by extension applies to the high priestly garments, the tabernacle, the Sabbath, and Israel.

The Book of Leviticus, is so devoted to the concept of holiness that chapters 17-20 have been called the Holiness Code. Basically the word "holy" connotes separation from the profane and appointment to Yahweh's service. Yahweh's holiness involves his power ([1 Sam 6:20](#)), transcendence, and moral perfection ([Isa 6:3](#) ; [35:8](#)).

His commandment to be holy does not imply the assumption of his incommunicable attributes by human beings such as transcendence and omnipotence, but requires one to fear him and to seek moral perfection. Isaiah, deeply moved by his encounter with the holy God ([Isa 6:3](#)), sensed his own uncleanness (v. 5). His recognition of God's holiness is confirmed by his frequent reference to God as the Holy One of Israel.

The moral core of the covenant, however, was described by another word, hesed, a rich concept requiring multiple terms in translation, such as "steadfast love," "lovingkindness," "mercy," "faithfulness," "trustworthiness," and "loyalty." This "trustworthiness" or "loyalty" that characterized God is set down in the ethical centerpiece of the law, the Ten Commandments, where God declares that he will show hesed "to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" ([Exod 20:6](#)). In some instances, it also carries the idea of compassion ([Jer 16:5](#)).

Whereas God related to Israel with a steadfastness of love and compassion, Israel should also relate to him with the same kind of loving loyalty. The prophet Micah (6:8) articulated it most clearly: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy (hesed), and to walk humbly with your God."

Thus, at Sinai God spells out his holy and loving character toward Israel and calls Israel to the same kind of holy living and loving loyalty toward him and toward their neighbors.

Wilderness Wanderings and Conquest:

The Old Testament God as a God of war becomes prominent in the era between the exodus and the monarchy. Already at the exodus from Egypt the Israelites proclaimed him as "warrior" ([Exod 15:3](#)), and the writer of Samuel speaks of Israel's battles belonging to the Lord ([1 Sam 18:17](#) ;[25:28](#)).

The Book of Judges operates on the thesis that Joshua tried to carry out the commandment to destroy the Canaanites, but the period of the judges operated by a new principle, allowing the Canaanites to remain in the land in order to test Israel's resolve to follow the Lord ([Judges 2:20-23](#)). In Judges, God intervenes in history at critical moments and manifests his sovereignty over nations.

Yet we must admit that the command to wage war against the Canaanites and God's involvement in such wars pose a challenge to Old Testament theology. At the same time, we also have to

remember that the Old Testament speaks out of an ancient context in which survival was most often the survival of the fittest. War was part of life.

Rejecting God's kindness:

When human beings reject God's kindness, he resorts to methods that characterize sinful human nature not to redeem the methods, but to redeem Israel and the world. Paul articulated this principle clearly in Romans 2:4-5. Another dimension of the command to exterminate the Canaanites is that they posed a threat to Israel's faith ([Exod 23:23-33](#) ; [Num 33:50-56](#) ; [Deut 7:1-6](#) ; [Judges 2:2](#)). Even in the time of Abraham, the Lord noted that the iniquity of the Amorites (Canaanites) was not yet full ([Gen 15:16](#)).

Thus, God's presence was critical to the success of the conquest of Canaan. He involved himself personally ([Joshua 6:8](#) ; [Joshua 10:11](#) [Joshua 10:12-14](#)) and the writer of Joshua took account of this in his statement, "the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel" ([10:42](#)).

Exile and Restoration:

Israel's history concludes with the fall of Samaria in 722 b.c., and Judah's history dips into a hiatus called the exile with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 b.c. In these national crises, God is seen as a God of judgment and wrath, but in the return from exile and the restoration, the Old Testament presents him as the God of compassion and salvation.

From the time of *Moses to Malachi*, God sent his servants the prophets, as his messengers. Whereas he had spoken to the patriarchs in dreams and visions, and to Moses directly, he spoke to Israel through the prophets.

Elijah was the exemplary prophet, calling Israel to return to Yahweh's covenant and worship only him. Through these intermediaries God again took the initiative in revelation and action as he had done in Israel's past, choosing the time and place where he would speak to his people. Just as he had entrusted his word to Moses, he also gave his word to the prophets and equipped them to speak it boldly ([Isa 6:6-13](#) ; [Jer 1:9-10](#)).

Their message was basically twofold. First, God is Judge. The sins of Israel had earned God's just punishment, which came ultimately in the form of conquest and the exile of Israel (722 b.c.) and Judah (586 b.c.), a series of events that the prophets were inclined to call the day of the Lord ([Amos 5:18-20](#)). Yahweh was not a despot whose actions were irrational, but he acted according to the principles of justice that he had set forth in the Torah, and he required that Israel operate by the same standard of justice.

At the heart of that system was the demand for undeviating loyalty to God and his will. This meant, as the Torah had commanded, that the Israelites should have no other gods besides Yahweh. Thus, the disloyalty for which the prophets indicted Israel was best summed up in their blatant idolatry.

The Book of Lamentations stands as an assessment of Judah's fall and a witness to Yahweh's mercy, which is renewed every morning ([Lam 3:22-24](#)).

The writer attributes the disaster to the failure of the prophets and priests, who were more interested in personal gain than the souls for whom they were responsible ([Lam 4:13-16](#)).

The restoration, originating in God's mercy, would be hastened by the people's despairing of their sin and hoping in the Lord. With a prayer for restoration the book closes ([5:19-22](#)).

2-, God is compassionate:

The final word in prophetic theology is grace. No prophet knew that better than Isaiah, who announced the era of restoration as a time when Yahweh would comfort his people and proclaimed Yahweh's forgiveness of Judah's sins (40:1-2). God's actions to restore Judah after the exile to Babylonia would be as mighty and compassionate as his deliverance of their ancestors from Egypt; that is, he would perform a second exodus ([Isa 35 ; 45](#)).

This miraculous era would manifest Yahweh's greatness in ways that would summon the nations to turn to him for salvation ([Isa 45:22](#)). So deep was God's compassion for Israel and the world that he would assume the form of a servant and take on himself Israel's suffering and sin ([Isa 53:4-6](#)).

The God of Israel's Sages and Singers.

God of Israel's Sages (Wisdom). God is known in the Old Testament as the God of wisdom in the Torah and Prophets, but this attribute never receives the kind of emphasis it does among the wise men (sages) and in the Wisdom Literature they produced (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes).

The idea of God's wisdom implies his understanding of the universe and its operation, both on the broad scale and the personal level. Thus, the wisdom of God includes his knowledge and administration of the created order (Job 38-39). It further implies that God implanted a certain orderliness and regularity in the universe, and that same design should be reflected in human life. It is this latter dimension of wisdom that contributes to the personal and practical expressions of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs.

Thus, one must live an orderly (moral) life in society so that society might become a reflection of the orderly universe, which in turn reflects something important about the nature of God.

Rather than emphasizing the precepts of the Torah or the oracles of the prophets, wisdom stresses the design of nature as a means of divine revelation. Since God, then, speaks more indirectly through nature than the Torah and prophets, it is not surprising that the Book of Ecclesiastes describes him as sometimes elusive, particularly in revealing to men and women the meaning of life. Yet to the persistent, a modicum of meaning can be found in the routine and work of life ([Eccl 2:24-26](#)).

The God of wisdom operates on the principle of just rewards and punishment. That is, he rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked a principle promoted by Job's friends and espoused by the Book of Proverbs. Yet the view of Wisdom Literature is broad enough to consider those cases when the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper. This is the problem of Job; even though the principle of retribution is basic to an orderly universe, Job insists that God does not always honor that principle.

When Yahweh finally speaks to Job out of the whirlwind ([Job 38:1-42:6](#)), he does not defend the principle or explain the breath of it, but proclaims his majestic knowledge and expert operation of the universe he made, and expounds the finite understanding of man. While human beings would argue the issue on the level of justice, God would prefer to argue it on the level of grace. So in the epilogue of Job ([42:7-17](#)), he not only restores Job's possessions but doubles them.

God of Israel's Singers (Psalms)

To sum up the view of God in psalms poses the same difficulty as the Torah and the Prophets. In the psalms God is so multifaceted and multifunctional that any summary is inadequate. Yet the psalms are a microcosm of Old Testament religion.

They contain some law, some prophecy, and some wisdom. Whatever portrait of God one finds in these genres of the Old Testament can generally also be identified somewhere in the psalms.

God is Creator and Sustainer ([Psalm 104](#)),

Redeemer and Savior ([Psalm 25:22](#)),

Vindicator of the Innocent ([Psalm 26](#)),

and Giver of mercy to the guilty ([Psalm 51](#)).

Although they portray God as the God of Israel who Acts on their behalf in history, the psalms are the basic Old Testament witness to personal religion. They are indeed Israel's hymnbook of worship, but they also document God's responsiveness to the devout worshiper who comes to him for mercy and help.

The New Testament:

From the Christian point of view, the God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New, except he manifests himself in different ways, most importantly in the incarnation. Yet the basic attributes of God are the same as those of the Old Testament. In one sense, the study of God in the New Testament is a study of Christology, even though that is not the focus of this article.

The generic term for God in the New Testament is theos, but kurios, the Greek rendering of the Hebrew YHWH, is frequently used instead of the generic term. Long before the Christian era, the Jews had stopped pronouncing the divine name so as not to disrespect or defame it. Instead, they gave to this four-consonant name (YHWH) the vowels of another Hebrew word, Adonai, which means "my Master" or "my Lord."

Rather than pronouncing it, they pronounced the loan word, Adonai. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the name YHWH or Adonai was rendered by the Greek word kurios, which means "Lord." So the God of the New Testament is frequently called kurios or Lord, as is Jesus.

The New Testament, like the Old, does not try to prove God's existence. Rather it declares, also like the Old Testament, that he exists and manifests himself in various ways, but finally he speaks through his Son Jesus Christ ([Heb 1:1-4](#)), who is superior to angels, priests, and all other manifestations of the divine Word.

God in the Synoptic Gospels:

The Synoptic Gospels present the story of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet behind that story is God. Matthew relates the birth of Jesus as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the coming of Immanuel, "God with us" ([Matt 1:23](#)). The God of the Old Testament makes himself present in the world in the form of human flesh.

The Kingdom of God:

The Synoptics focus on the God who sends Jesus and empowers him by stressing the kingdom of God,

the salvation of God,

and Christ as the son of God.

They present the message of Jesus in terms of the imminent approach of the kingdom of God (Matthew prefers kingdom of heaven), a phrase that has both material and spiritual connotations. In the Old Testament Yahweh's kingdom refers to his sovereign reign over the world ([Psalm 103:10](#) ; [145:13](#)). The principles of this kingdom derive from its King, God himself, and they are laid down in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). The citizens of the kingdom are known as "children of God" ([Matt 5:9](#)), and the standard of righteousness demanded of them originates in God himself ([Matt 5:48](#)), in much the same way as God demanded Israel to be holy because he was holy.

The kingdom of God,

Is a concept that links to the original command that humankind as his agents should subdue and take dominion of the earth ([Gen 1:28](#)). This long process with its successes and failures laid out in Old Testament history finally arrives at a new level of accomplishment in the appearance of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, of whose divinity the Synoptics are convinced. On behalf of humankind, he personally took dominion over the world as he cast out demons, healed diseases, commanded nature ([Mark 11:20](#) ; [Luke 8:24-26](#)), and forgave sinners. In Christ God was taking dominion of the world he had made.

The kingdom of God was realized in Jesus Christ as the reign of God in much the same way as a modern monarch reigns (but does not rule), anticipating the rule of God in the eschatological age. Yet the reign of God can become the rule of God in the hearts of those individuals who submit to the power of Christ as they await the historical reality of the kingdom when the kingdom of the world becomes "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" ([Rev 11:15](#)).

The Salvation of God:

In the Old Testament God's saving action appears in the form of deliverance from war, personal distress, illness, and political oppression. While these dimensions of salvation are not all laid aside in the New Testament, the concept has assumed a spiritual dimension that becomes the controlling idea.

In sending Jesus, declared Luke, God has "raised up a horn of salvation" for Israel in the house of David ([Luke 1:69](#)), which includes the forgiveness of sins ([Luke 1:77](#)). When Simeon saw the infant Christ, he declared "My eyes have seen your salvation" ([Luke 2:30](#)). Luke interprets the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (40:3-5) that the salvation of God would illuminate the wilderness ([Luke 3:4-6](#)). This is the sense of salvation in Lu 19:9, where Jesus declares that as a consequence of Zacchaeus's repentant spirit, salvation had come to his house.

The Son of God:

This phrase can refer to human beings ([Luke 3:38](#)), but the meaning that concerns us here is its reference to Jesus because he is God and partakes of the divine nature. The title could simply designate the Messiah ([Mark 1:1](#) ; [Matt 16:16](#)), but in Matthew 11:25-27 Jesus' sonship

involves a unique and exclusive relationship between the Father and the Son. His knowledge of the Father is in the same degree as the Father's knowledge of him.

God in the Fourth Gospel.

If the Synoptics leave a slight margin of uncertainty about the divinity of Jesus, the Gospel of John declares it unequivocally, calling Jesus the Word (logos and declaring that "the Word was God" ([1:1](#)).

John accents the theological doctrine that Isaiah had expressed so clearly ([Isaiah 43:1-7](#) [Isaiah 43:14-16](#) ; [45:1-7](#)), that the Creator and the Redeemer are one ([1:10-13](#) ; see also [1 Cor 8:6](#) ; [Col 1:16](#)). Further, the Gospel subtly identifies Jesus with Yahweh of the Old Testament, who revealed himself as i am to Moses ([Exod 3:14](#) ; see [John 6:35](#) [John 6:48](#) ; [8:12](#) ; [John 10:7](#) [John 10:9](#) ; [John 10:11](#) [John 10:14](#) ; [11:25](#) ; [14:6](#) ; [John 15:1](#) [John 15:5](#)).

God as Father.

The concept of God as Father of Israel ([Deut 32:6](#)) and the individual ([Deut 8:5](#)) originates in the Old Testament. While the Synoptics use the term also, John's Gospel capitalizes on this title for God, emphasizing Jesus' intimate relationship to God as Son: "I and the Father are one" ([10:30](#)). Jesus' enemies heard in the description of his relationship to the Father a claim to equality with God ([5:18](#)).

Yet Jesus' reference to God as his Father is only one side of the picture. The other is that God acknowledges Jesus as his Son, a point made more directly by Matthew and Luke than by John. At the baptism of Jesus the voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well please" ([Matt 3:17](#) ; [Luke 3:22](#)).

God as Spirit.

The Old Testament witnesses insist that God is a spiritual Being, even though they often speak of him in anthropomorphic terms. Indeed, they urge an absolute difference between God and man ([Num 23:19](#) ; [Hosea 11:9](#)). Jesus puts the idea of God as Spirit in the context of worship in the new age that he inaugurated: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" ([John 4:24](#)). The spiritual nature of God demands a spiritual response from human beings that is not tied to localities as was worship in the temple, whether on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem, but is centered on Christ the Truth.

John goes beyond this idea and lays out the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father ([15:26](#)) and is sent by the Son ([16:7](#)). In the Old Testament the term "holy Spirit" refers to the manifestation of God's presence in the world ([Psalm 51:11](#)).

In the Fourth Gospel the Holy Spirit is a Person as are the Father and Son. Yet the unity of God is still maintained by Jesus and by Paul ([Mark 12:29](#) ; [Rom 3:30](#)). The trinitarian view of God is already implied in the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 and the Pauline benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14.

God in the Acts of the Apostles:

The Book of Acts represents God's action in history after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. God sent the Holy Spirit to empower his people for the task of proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Peter announced at Pentecost that God had raised Jesus from the dead ([Acts 2:24](#)). The reality of the resurrection, so shattering to the kingdom of sin and death, is the dominating theme of this new age. While Acts is a witness to the risen Christ, it was the God of the fathers who

raised him from the dead ([Acts 5:30](#)) and empowered the disciples to carry on his mission to the world.

God in the Pauline Letters:

The apostle Paul plumbs the depths of the meaning of the cross and the resurrection. In these events, God has revealed his wisdom and power. In the cross God took on himself the weakness of human flesh and showed that his weakness is insurpassably greater than the power of men and that his wisdom is unimaginably wiser than human understanding ([1 Cor 1:22-25](#)). The blessings that God has prepared for those who love him are summed up in the cross and resurrection ([1 Cor 2:9-10](#)). In fact, the salvation that God had bestowed upon Old Testament Israel only in part became a historical reality in Christ ([1 Cor 15:15](#)).

God as elected believers, not merely in Abraham, but before the foundation of the world ([Eph 1:4](#)).

Paul understands the mystery of the gospel that the Old Testament witnesses had not comprehended that God has united in one body both Jews and Gentiles through the cross ([Eph 2:15-16](#) ; [3:4-5](#)), and through Christ has reconciled the world to himself ([2 Cor 5:19](#)). Indeed, in Christ God has not merely repaired the broken human creature, but has re-created him ([2 Cor 5:17](#)) and conformed him to the image of his Son ([Rom 8:29](#)).

God in the General Epistles:

God, who spoke so clearly and in various ways in the Old Testament, ultimately and decisively has spoken in the new age through his Son Jesus Christ ([Heb 1:1-3](#)). The old ways of speaking through angels, Moses, Joshua, and the levitical priests were inadequate, so God has spoken through Christ with decisive finality.

When Christ's suffering on the cross was finished, he sat down in his place of honor and authority at the right hand of God in heaven ([Heb 10:12](#) ; [12:2](#)). The entire historical process of faith, represented by Old Testament worthies known and unknown, reached its climax in Jesus Christ, who has become the focus of faith. The rallying cry of the weak and heartless is now, "Consider him who endured from sinners such opposition from sinful men" ([Heb 12:1-3](#)).

How one should live during the interim between the resurrection and the second coming of Christ was a major topic of discussion in the New Testament church. That concern preoccupied James. Although God, the Father of lights, has redeemed his people ([1:17-18](#)) and planted his Word in their hearts ([1:21](#)), there are yet temptations and trials to deal with before they inherit the kingdom of God ([2:5](#)). James offers admonitions for this interim period.

Peter's understanding of God contains the basics of the doctrine of the Trinity. He mentions the Father, Spirit, and Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 1:2, and the three Persons of the Trinity figure prominently in the work of redemption as Peter outlines it. This marvelous light into which God, sovereign and transcendent, has called his people, was planned by God before the world came into existence ([1 Peter 1:20](#)). And not only had he preordained this work of grace, but he had reconstituted the nation as a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, " that they might declare his praises ([1 Peter 2:9](#)).

John's teaching in this three epistles also provides instruction for living during this interim period. When one sins, Christ is the Advocate with the Father ([1 John 2:1](#)), who forgives and

cleanses us from unrighteousness ([1 John 1:9](#)). In addition to portraying God as a loving Father, John provides two other descriptive themes:

God is light and God is love. Both originate in the Old Testament. The concept of God as light, in whom is no darkness, links John's thought to Genesis 1:3, where God created light and separated it from darkness, thus separating himself from darkness and associating himself with light. This light has shone finally and resplendently in Jesus Christ, and it is in that light that the new life becomes reality ([1 John 1:5-7](#)).

The second theme, so reminiscent of Old Testament theological language to describe God's relationship to Israel (cf. [Deut 7](#)), declares God is love ([1 John 4:8](#)). Only in that truth can one fulfill the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, a commandment based in the nature of Yahweh ([Lev 19:18](#)). This commandment, so contrary to human nature, has found in Christ a new orientation ([1 John 3:16](#)) and a new enablement by a rebirth into God through Christ ([1 John 3:9](#) ; [4:7](#)).

God in the Revelation of John.

In the canonical order of the Bible there is a wonderful symmetry between the first book (Genesis) and the final book (Revelation). The sovereign, omnipotent God, who created the universe by his Word, re-creates the heavens and earth and takes his abode among his people, destroying death and all its emotional accouterments ([Rev 21:1-4](#)).

By his omnipotent power God brings his kingdom, outlined in Israel's history and anticipated by the prophets, to reality, transforming the kingdom of the world into his kingdom, and thus achieving the subjection of the world to his sovereign will and purpose, a task incumbent upon the first man ([Gen 1:28](#)) and accomplished by the Second Man Jesus Christ ([Rev 11:15](#)).