

“Perfections of God” From God’s Prophet Jeremiah

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The book of Jeremiah highlights several of God’s perfections, also known as His attributes. Jeremiah’s prophecies display God’s role as the Defender of His people; they raise the question of God’s essence or being, His faithfulness, foreknowledge, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, His deity, His truthfulness, and His judicial role as Judge of the world. God is deity; God is supernatural, not natural. He is the Creator, not the creature. God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all His perfections or attributes.

God is the Defender of His people.

Jeremiah reminds us that God rules the universe! We are not ruled by fate or blind chance. God does not live to enjoy ease and indulge in idleness, but to govern the universe, to exercise His power throughout heaven and earth, to judge men, to render to every one his own just reward. Life in God is not an idle life, as ungodly men imagine, but includes His infinite power, justice, wisdom, and all that peculiarly belongs to Him. Whenever then we speak of the life of God, let us know that we do not live except through Him and also that He does not sit idly and carelessly in heaven, but that He governs the whole world and is the Judge of men (Jer. 38:16).¹

God undertook the cause of His Church, and therefore complained that war was made on Him by the ungodly whenever they assaulted the faithful (Jer. 51:1).²

When the ungodly seek evasions and say that they do not contend with God, their pretences are disproved, when they carry on war with His Church, and fight against His faithful people, whose safety He has undertaken to defend. For God cannot be otherwise the Protector of His Church than by setting Himself up as a shield in its defense whenever He sees His people unjustly attacked by the reprobate (Jer. 50:29).³

As many enemies surround the Church on every side and the Devil ever excites everywhere commotions and disturbances, let us know that God will be the Defender of His people. Therefore, no matter how much the whole world may attempt to tread under foot His favor, God will yet not suffer [allow] them to accomplish their fury; for He has the power not only to restrain their assaults, but also completely to destroy them and to obliterate their memory (Jer. 30:20).⁴

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, Vol. IV, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 405.

² Vol. V, 197.

³ Vol. V, 172.

⁴ Vol. IV, 41-42.

God's Being or Essence

God is the fountain of life, and the life of all; His essence is spiritual and also infinite, for as He has created the heaven and the earth, so of necessity He sustains both by His power (Jer. 51:19).

God cannot be comprehended by us except in His works. As then vain men weary themselves with speculations, which have not in them any practical knowledge, it is no wonder that they run headlong into many delirious things. Let us then be sober in this respect, so that we may not inquire into the essence of God more than it becomes us. When therefore we seek to comprehend what God is or how to attain the knowledge of Him, let us direct all our thoughts, and eyes, and minds to His works (Jer. 51:19).⁵

God's Faithfulness

Jeremiah 33:25-26 "Thus says the LORD: 'If My covenant *is* not with day and night, *and if* I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, 'then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take *any* of his descendants *to be* rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them.' "

God declares, in effect, "For I am the same God, who created the heaven and the earth, who fixed all the laws of nature which remain unchangeable, and who also has made a covenant with My Church. If My faithfulness as to the laws of nature does not change, why should My faithfulness change as to that sacred covenant which I have made with My chosen people?"⁶

God's faithfulness is exhibited in His constancy; God does not change (Heb. 13:8). What then does Scripture mean when it says that God relents or repents? As nothing is hidden from God, so it can never be that He repents. How so? Because He has never determined anything that is not according to His certain foreknowledge, for all things are before His eyes. But this kind of speaking, that God repents [or relents], that is, that He does not execute what He has announced, refers to what appears to men. It is no wonder that God thus condescendingly speaks to us; but while this simplicity offends delicate and tender ears, we on the contrary wonder at God's indulgence in thus coming down to us, and speaking according to the comprehension of our weak capacities. We now perceive how God may be said to repent, even when He does not execute what He had denounced. His purpose in the meantime remains fixed and as James says, "There is in Him no shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17). (Jer. 26:17-19)⁷

God's Foreknowledge

God often declares by Isaiah, when He claims to Himself alone the foreknowledge of things, "Go," He says, "and inquire whether the gods of the Gentiles will answer as to future things" (Isa. 34:7). We see that God ascribes to Himself alone this peculiarity, that He foreknows future events and testifies respecting them. And surely nothing can be

⁵ Vol. V, 228.

⁶ Vol. IV, 266.

⁷ Vol. III, 337.

more clear than that God alone can speak of hidden things; men, indeed, can conjecture this or that, but they are often mistaken (Jer. 28:7-9; cf. Deut. 13:1-2; 18:18).⁸

Future events cannot be known except by God alone; foreknowledge is His exclusive property, so that nothing that is future or hidden can be predicted except by Him alone. However, it does not follow that God does not permit liberty to the devil and his ministers to foretell something that is true. How is this? As the case was with Balaam, who was an impostor, ready to let on hire or to sell his prophecies, and yet he was a prophet. But it was a peculiar gift to foretell things; from where did he have this? Not from the devil any further than it pleased God; and yet the truth had no other fountain than God Himself and His Spirit.⁹

These terms are not convertible—to foretell what is true and to be a true prophet; for some, as I have said, predict what is found afterwards by trial and experience to be true, and yet they are impostors.¹⁰

God as Judge

God had rejoiced when He punished His people for their wickedness, for God delights in judgment as well as in mercy. God then for a time rejoiced when He punished the people; for as His judgment is right, He delights in it (Jer. 32:41).¹¹

Though God may suffer [allow] for a time the ungodly to rage against His Church, yet He will be at the suitable season its Avenger, so that they shall everywhere be slain who have been thus cruel (Jer. 51:49).¹²

We ought by no means to despair when God allows so much liberty to the ungodly, so that they slay the miserable and the innocent, for the same thing happened formerly to the ancient people. It was the Church of God in which the Chaldeans committed that carnage of which the Prophet speaks; the children of God were then slain as sheep. If the same thing should happen to us at this day, there would be no reason for us to despond [become disheartened], but to wait for the time of vengeance of which the Prophet speaks here; for experience will then show how precious to God is the life of all the godly.¹³

God's Omniscience

Jeremiah 23:23-24 "Am I a God near at hand," says the LORD, "And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?" says the LORD; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the LORD." God shakes off from hypocrites their self-delusions; for they were complacent in their vices because they thought that they could in a manner blind the eyes of God. They did not indeed say so; but the heedless security of men would never be so great as it is were they to believe that nothing is hidden from God, but that He penetrates into the inmost recesses of the heart, that He

⁸ Vol. III, 397.

⁹ Vol. III, 397.

¹⁰ Vol. III, 398.

¹¹ Vol. IV, 220.

¹² Vol. V, 271.

¹³ Vol. V, 271.

discerns between the thoughts and the feelings, and leaves not unobserved the very marrow. If, then, this truth were fixed in the hearts of all, they would certainly obey God with more reverence, and also dread His threatenings.¹⁴

God is said to be a God afar off, because His eyes penetrate into the lowest depths, so that nothing can escape Him, nothing is hidden from Him (Jer. 23:23-24).¹⁵ Scripture says that God sees all things; but we ought especially to consider for what purpose it is that He sees all things; which is evidently this—that He may at last call to judgment whatever is done by men. There is then an application of the doctrine to our case; for we hence learn that whatever we do, think, and speak is known to God.¹⁶ God is an eye-witness of all things, that He may at last appear as our Judge.¹⁷

Jeremiah says of the Sovereign LORD: “*You are* great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes *are* open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 32:19). The providence of God so extends to all parts of the world, that the works of men cannot possibly be hidden from Him; no one can escape His hand. The Prophet Jeremiah shows what the end of God’s providence is, why God has His eyes open—it is so that He may at last produce at His tribunal all the sayings and doings of men, yes, even their thoughts. We are further taught by these words that our life cannot be rightly formed, unless we bear in mind the presence of God, so as to know that His eyes are on us, and that there is nothing hidden from Him; for why is there so much liberty in sinning, except that men grow reckless like fugitives? As when a rebellious son withdraws himself from the eyes of his father and then thinks he can abandon himself entirely to sin, for he is freed from all fear and shame. So our thoughtlessness is like a flight, for we think that we are far removed from God. This then, as I have said, ought always to be remembered, that the eyes of God are open, viewing all our ways, and for this end—that He may render to every one according to his ways, and that every one may gather the fruit of his own doings (Jer. 32:19).¹⁸

God’s Omnipotence

Nothing does more hinder or prevent us from embracing the promise of God, than to think of what may be done naturally or of what is probable. When, therefore, we thus consult our own thoughts, we exclude the power of God, which is superior to all the means that may be used (Jer. 51:53).¹⁹

God is faithful to His promises and constantly keeps His covenant, so He is not destitute of power, so as not to be able to save His people and to rescue them, when it pleases Him, from death itself (Jer. 51:5).²⁰

Jeremiah 51:16 says this of God, “When He utters *His* voice -- *There is* a multitude of waters in the heavens: He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He

¹⁴ Vol. III, 185.

¹⁵ Vol. III, 187-188.

¹⁶ Vol. III, 188.

¹⁷ Vol. IV, 176.

¹⁸ Vol. IV, 175-176.

¹⁹ Vol. V, 277.

²⁰ Vol. V, 201.

makes lightnings for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures." There is a difference between a fixed order of nature and those changes which are daily observed; for were the appearance of the heaven and the earth always the same, God's power and wisdom could not appear so wonderful; but when the heavens are covered with clouds, when the air is now tranquil, and then disturbed by winds, when storms suddenly arise, and then rains follow, God thus vividly sets forth His manifold wisdom and power.²¹

God's Omnipresence

Let us recall the words of Jeremiah 23:23-24: "*Am I a God near at hand,*" says the LORD, "*And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?*" says the LORD; "*Do I not fill heaven and earth?*" says the LORD." What therefore God declares here, that He fills heaven and earth, ought to be applied to His providence and His power; as though He had said that He is not so taken up with things in heaven that He neglects the concerns of earth, as profane men dream; but He is said to fill heaven and earth because He governs all things, because all things are noticed by Him, because He is, in short, the Judge of the world.²²

Because He fills heaven and earth His providence, His power, and His justice are so diffused everywhere that wherever men betake themselves, it is impossible for them to be concealed from Him.²³

God's truthfulness; God is truth (John 14:6).

Whenever we misuse God's name, it is a kind of sacrilege; for nothing is deemed more precious by God than truth; yes, as He Himself is truth and is so called (John 14:6), there is nothing more adverse to His nature than falsehood. It is then an intolerable profanation of God's name whenever it is falsely appealed to; and thus perjury is allied with sacrilege. God's name is indeed polluted in other ways than by perjury, that is, when God's name is taken in vain rashly, thoughtlessly, and without reverence. But the most heinous pollution of God's name is when the truth is changed into a lie. (Jer. 34:16)²⁴

God's unity and exclusivity; God is one.

Since He is the only true God, it follows that the inventions or figments of men are altogether delirious, and are therefore the artifices and impostures of the devil to deceive mankind. We hence see that the doctrine of the Prophet is exclusive, when he says that God is the *maker of all things*; for where the maker of all things is not found, there certainly no divinity can be. (Jer. 51:19)²⁵

²¹ Vol. V, 222.

²² Vol. III, 189.

²³ Vol. III, 189.

²⁴ Vol. IV, 290.

²⁵ Vol. V, 228.