

GOD IS AWESOME!

The word "awesome" is used so lightly nowadays. There is awesome food, awesome vacations, awesome people, and even awesome bad luck. The word has become jargon, a bye-word, and slang. However the word "awesome" truly describes the God of the Bible.

The word "awesome" literally means "inspiring awe." "Awe" is a mixture of feelings. That which is awesome may inspire a collection of emotions, experienced all at the same time. A feeling can be mixed with fear, gratitude, reverence, and wonder. Something is a "wonder" when it causes astonishment and/or admiration. It may take us by surprise, but it ignites our imagination and our curiosity! Awe of God may begin with wonder and end with gratitude and reverence.

Sometimes we say that we "stand in awe." Many things may cause us to stand in awe but among the strongest of causes must be impressive sights. When standing on a mountain and looking across God's creation a person can feel awe. Stand beside a mighty river and a person can feel awe. Stand in the valley and look up to a snowy mountain and you are likely to experience awe. Examine the life and behavior of the smallest of God's creatures and discover awe. Examine the proper functioning of just one human organ and you will likely stand in awe. Study the sky, the vast universe above us, and you will likely stand in awe. Yes, the handiwork of the God who reveals Himself in the Bible is awesome!

The Bible (literally meaning "The Book") is a collection of writings that were written by about forty individuals across fifteen-hundred years. This book is awe inspiring. The writers came to stand in awe of God. They were called seers, prophets, people of faith, apostles (which literally means "sent ones"). All but one of those forty people was Hebrew, descendants of Abraham, Jewish people who had experienced the Awesome God.

Probably the first prophet to write down his experiences with God was Moses. Once, Moses actually sat in the presence of God for forty consecutive days. However Moses' experiences with God were continual from the time Moses was 80 years old until his death at 120. During that period of his life, Moses wrote down what he had learned from God in five books, the first five books of the Bible. Moses lived approximately 1400 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Although Moses seems to have been the first prophet to write down his experiences with God, he was not the first person to hear words from God. God told Moses the story of God's contact with the world and the humans whom God

had created. Moses wrote it down in the book we call Genesis. All the events recorded in the book of Genesis happened centuries before Moses was born. The Awesome God showed Moses how He had created the universe and had revealed Himself to Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, and Abram (whom God renamed Abraham). When renaming Abram God said, "No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations." (Genesis 17:5 NIV) Abraham had only two sons, but from those two sons Abraham indeed became the fleshly father of many nations. But those who emulate the Faith of Abraham make him "the [spiritual] father of us all" who are spread across every nation of the world! (Romans 4:16)

But Abraham was not nearly the last person to whom the Awesome God spoke. Abraham's grandson Jacob also heard from God. In fact, once, either God or a representative of God (who we usually call an angel) wrestled with Jacob. That's right! They wrestled all night long. Before daybreak the stranger struggled to be released but Jacob would not release his hold. The stranger then touched Jacob's hip and threw it out of joint. Still Jacob held on to the stranger. The man said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The stranger then said to Jacob, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the stranger said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But the stranger replied, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him." (Genesis 32:26-29 ESV)

That morning God did not want to reveal His name! However, fifteen hundred years later, by the days of Hosea the prophet, every Hebrew knew the name of God! In most English translations of the Bible the name of God is never written! That right! That decision follows the ancient Jewish custom of never saying the name of God. They would write it, but they would not say it! And so when a prophet wrote the name of God in its four consonant letters, YHWH, the reader would substitute the word "Lord." This substitution with the word "lord" is indicated in English translations by capitalizing the word LORD for the written name of God. Therefore, when Hosea, a Hebrew prophet who lived about 750 years before Christ, wrote of Jacob's encounter with the awesome YHWH, he said this, "In the womb he [Jacob] grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there-- the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name!" (Hosea 12:3-6 NIV) After wrestling with that

representative of the LORD God Jacob named that location Peniel, which means "face of God." Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (Genesis 32:30 KJV) Even the awesome almighty LORD allows His creation, His children, the strength and the choice of struggling with Him. Do you struggle with God? Do you fight Him or fight alongside Him?

God is Awesome for this very reason that He condescends to struggle with mankind! That's right! The Psalmist put it this way, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalms 8:3-9 NIV) Job exclaimed, "What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention, that you examine them every morning and test them every moment?" (Job 7:17-18 NIV)

Yes, it is a marvel that the Awesome God condescends to people. But that's what humans do when they love someone. You will struggle with someone you love. If they hurt, you will hurt. If they rejoice, then you will rejoice. If they go wrong, then you will attempt to bring them back into the right. You will do it for your children; you will do it for your grandchildren; you will do it for anyone else whom you love! Love is that way. God is Love. Yes, God is awesome because He condescends to struggle with mankind.

The struggle between God and human beings is a struggle for that which is "right." There is a "right" way to live, but humans have a hard time finding it. If there is a "right" way, then that suggests that there is a "wrong" way to live. Who is to say what is right and what is wrong? The awesome God is the standard of right and wrong and this is the reason the awesome God struggles with human beings. There is a "right" way to behave. There is a right way to treat your neighbor, and a right way to honor God.

There is, of course, that thing that may neither be right or wrong! It is neutral. You can do it or not. In other words, there is no moral obligation connected with that behavior. However, to say something is "right" is to say that its opposite is wrong. If there is a right way, then there is also a wrong way. If there is a right decision, then there is also a wrong decision. If your decision is neither right nor wrong, but simply right for you, then your decision is not a moral

choice. It has nothing to do with morality. However, if God has spoken about your decision and your decision is the "right" choice according to God, then that decision has everything to do with your morality!

This is exactly the reason the Awesome God stoops to struggle with mankind. This is the reason God has made Himself known to the world! This is why God speaks! This is the reason Jesus said that man should live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4) After Adam's firstborn son, Cain, brought an unacceptable sacrifice to the worship of God, God said to Cain, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4:7 NIV) Friends, Sin is crouching at your door! The Awesome God struggles with you over sin. Ah yes, O "LORD, what are human beings that you care for them, mere mortals that you think of them?" (Psalms 144:3 NIV) God cares because He loves His creation, His children. Therefore, God is Awesome because He loves you and is not willing that you should perish! Do you know what it means to perish?

Sin that crouches at our door is the work of Satan, God's rebellious adversary. Satan will "perish" and all of his followers! (Matthew 25:41) The Bible also calls this perishing "death". The word "death" literally means "separation." Sin separates people and Satan from their Creator. Sin causes death. (Romans 6:23) The separation caused by sin began for the human race with the separation of the human spirit from its fleshly body, death. The fleshly body dies when the eternal human spirit departs from the body. (James 2:26) This is the first death, the first separation.

The first "death" was brought into the world at the very beginning of human history. Every human being in the world experiences the first death because of the first sin of Adam and Eve, the first human beings. God's created humans, Adam and Eve, at the instigation of Satan, sinned by choosing the "wrong" way (Satan's way) instead of following the "right" way that God had spoken to them. (Genesis 3) Because of their sin, God separated Adam and Eve from the daily sustenance that could have made their flesh (and their children's flesh) immortal! Physical death had entered the world. It was a "death", a separation from eternal life in the flesh. Although Adam and Eve could pass along an immortal spirit (made in God's image), they could not pass along the sustenance that could have made the flesh immortal!

This "first" death was passed on to all humans as a result of the first sin. Thus "...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...."

(Hebrews 9:27 ESV) But notice, it is appointed to die once, but dying in the flesh is not the end! There is a judgment to be rendered, and this is the reason the awesome God struggles with humans even until today. God wants His creation to be justified at that judgment day so there is only one death, not two! God has redeemed mankind! Humans can escape the second separation, the total separation from the Creator. God did it by allowing His Son Jesus Christ to carry the penalty for human sin, all of human sin. The awesome God has so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for the redemption, the salvation of the world. (John 3:16) Following the appointed judgment day there will come a "second" separation, a second death. But the awesome God has not given up on humans!

The awesome God who is revealed in the Bible continuously carries on this struggle with humans. God is not willing that any human should perish a "second" death! We have to die once because of Adam, but we do not have to "perish" the second time because of Jesus Christ! God's way of escape is through Jesus Christ and our escape depends upon our repentance. Jesus' apostle Peter wrote that "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise [about the end of the world and Judgment Day], as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9 NIV) God has made a way to keep us from perishing. That way is the way of repentance. God has delayed the end of the world and Judgment because He wants people to have the time to repent of wrongdoing and be saved!

The knowledge that humans have another chance to be saved from the penalty of our sins is enough to inspire within us feelings of gratitude and respect. And perhaps we can even come to love the One who has loved us. Jesus' apostle John wrote, "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Once you believe and love the awesome God who loves you, then you can repent of your sins, confess your faith in Jesus Christ, and be buried with Christ in water for the forgiveness of your sins. You will be raised from the watery grave with Christ who will then add you to His Church. (Acts 2:37-47)