

THEISM

The Living God

The Bible often describes God by using modifying terms. One of the better known expressions is “God Almighty,” which is used eleven times in eleven verses. However, a more frequently used expression in biblical times was “the living God,” which is used thirty times in thirty verses (NKJV). Why God is designated as “the living God” is not always indicated. However, some reasons seem evident. **First, God may be called the living God because he is the source of all life.** Only God has life in himself (John 5:26) and only God can give life to others. After creating the heavens and the earth and all things in them, God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures . . . So God created . . . every living thing that moves” (Genesis 1:20, 21). “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). God not only gives life, he is the means by which all life is sustained (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 66:9; Acts 17:25).

Second God seems sometimes to have been called the “living God” because he is perceived to be the true God who is alive in contrast to false gods of idolatry (Acts 14:15; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9) which are dead (Psalms 115:3-8; 135:15-18; Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:8-10, 14). Elijah caused Israel to acknowledge the true God when he challenged the priests of Ba’al to produce sacrificial fire from heaven. When they could not, Elijah prayed to God and fire fell from heaven to consume his sacrifice (1 Kings 17-18).

Third, to speak about the “living God” is to talk about a God of power. Although idol worshippers may attribute power to their gods, the Bible indicates that only “the living God” has power. “The living God . . . made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them” (Acts 14:15). The power of God was recognized by the Persian king Darius after Daniel was not eaten by lions. He therefore made a decree “that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions” (Daniel 6:25-27). When the Israelites were about to go into the land of Canaan, Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites . . .” (Joshua 3:10). In the Bible, the consistent portrait of the living God is that he is the true and powerful God.

The living God speaks. The worlds were framed by the word of God (Genesis 1; Hebrews 11:1). Many times God spoke directly to individuals, as to Adam (Genesis 2:16-17), to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), to Moses (Exodus 3:4ff) etc. When the Ten Commandments were given, people “heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire” (Deuteronomy 5:22, 26). Sometimes God spoke through dreams (Genesis 28:11-16; Matthew 1:19-24) or visions (Ezekiel 8:3ff; Daniel 4:1-18; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). God spoke in previous times through the prophets, but now speaks to us through his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). When Jesus was baptized – and again when he was transfigured – God spoke, saying “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; 2 Peter 1:16-21). Jesus Christ, who declares God (John 1:18) is acknowledged as the “Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16; John 6:69). By the word of God we will be judged (Hebrews 4:12, 13; see also John 12:47-48).

The living God listens. He heard the prayer of Hannah, who vowed that if God would give her a son, she would give him to the Lord. God granted her request (1 Samuel 1:11-28).

God heard the prayer of Solomon who desired an understanding heart that he might rule righteously, God not only granted him wisdom, but also riches (1 Kings 3:5-14). God heard the prayer of Hezekiah requesting that the reproach of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, might be overcome. God assured Hezekiah that Sennacherib's army would be turned back from destroying Jerusalem. And they were (2 Kings 19:15-36; Isaiah 37:15-37).

The living God often takes the initiative, as he did in making man in his own image (Genesis 1:27) and designating requirements for Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:28-30; 2:16-17). God initiated a call to Abram to leave Ur of Chaldee to receive an inheritance in another place (Genesis 12:1-3; Acts 7:3-4; Hebrews 11:8). At a burning bush, God commissioned Moses to go to Egypt to bring the Israelites from that country (Exodus 3:4-22). At Mt. Sinai, God gave a law through Moses to guide the newly formed Israelite nation (Exodus 19:1-40:38; John 1:17). When the Israelite nation was in the Promised Land, God chose David to become king over his people (1 Samuel 16:1-13; 2 Samuel 12:7). God selected prophets to call the people back to him (Jeremiah 7:21-25; Zechariah 1:1-6). In the New Testament, God sent his Son into the world to redeem humanity (John 3:17; 1 John 4:10; Revelation 5:9). God called the Apostle Paul to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21).

The living God reacts toward people to reward and to punish. Because Noah was faithful, he found grace with God (Genesis 6:8). Therefore he and his household were spared when the world was destroyed by a universal flood (Genesis 6-8; Hebrews 11:7). Because Joshua and Caleb believed that God would give the Israelites the Promised Land, their lives were spared while all other Israelites were condemned to perish (Numbers 14:36-38; Deuteronomy 2:14-16).

The living God reacts not only to reward righteousness, but also to punish evil. When Cain killed his brother Abel, God withheld the earth's productivity from him, thus making Cain a fugitive and a vagabond (Genesis 3:12-14). When "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," God brought a universal flood upon the earth (Genesis 6:5). When the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah became excessively wicked, God reacted by raining down fire and brimstone upon them (Genesis 19:20-25; Jude 7). "God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7) "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

The "living God" is "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:10). Through Christ, both Jews and Gentiles may become "sons of the living God" (Romans 9:26; Hosea 1:10). Through the blood of Christ, our consciences may be cleansed "from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14). Believers in Christ have "the seal of the living God" (Revelation 7:2; 1 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30), are called to "serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9), and are commanded "not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). The living God dwells in his temple, the church (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Timothy 3:15), which is also described as "the city of the living God" (Hebrews 12:22).

How wonderful it is to serve the true, powerful, and living God! Even so, brethren should beware "lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). May we be like the Psalmist who declared, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:2). "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2).