

# **The Finger of God (Exodus 31:18)**

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

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## **I. Review from the Previous Lessons**

- a. Moses and his assistant Joshua had gone up Mount Sinai (**Read Exodus 24:9-15**).
  - i. They were called up by the Lord, Who said He would be giving Moses the 10 Commandments on stone tablets.
  - ii. They left the elders behind and left Aaron and Hur in charge, with the instructions “wait for us until we come back”.
- b. Moses fasted for 40 days during this time.
- c. While up on the mountain, the Lord showed Moses the pattern for the tabernacle and gave very specific instructions for constructing it, as well as for anointing and clothing the high priest (Aaron) and the priests (his sons) who would serve there.
  - i. We have spent the past several lessons discussing that in detail.
  - ii. It explains in **Hebrews** that the tabernacle is a physical representation of spiritual realities (heaven, the church, Jesus foreshadowed by the High Priest, etc.).
- d. Now Moses is about to descend the mountain and return to his people.

## **II. Written with the Finger of God**

- a. Read **Exodus 31:18**.
- b. Then let us also read **Exodus 32:15** and **34:27-28**, which provide more details regarding the stone tablets.
- c. Details we learn regarding the stone tablets:
  - i. At the end of speaking with Moses, the Lord gives him the *two* stone tablets.
  - ii. The tablets are engraved with writing *on both sides*.
  - iii. From the second time that the stones are created (**Exodus 34:27-28**), we know that the 10 Commandments are written on them.
    - 1. The first set of stones was given to Moses by the Lord.

2. The second set of stones (to replace the ones smashed by Moses) are cut by Moses and brought up the mountain. Then the Lord commands Moses to write down the words, the 10 Commandments.
- iv. The first (original) set of stones was written “with the finger of God”.
- d. **Question:** What does the expression “written with the *finger of God*” mean? What is the *finger* of God?
  - i. **Question:** Does God (the Father) have actual fingers, as we humans do?
    1. Consider the following passages, which use anatomical references in speaking of God (whether figurative or literal):
      - a. “So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a *mighty hand* and with an *outstretched arm*, with great terror and with signs and wonders.” (**Deuteronomy 26:8**, NKJV)
      - b. “The LORD has *made bare His holy arm* In the eyes of all the nations.... Who has believed our report? And to whom has the *arm of the LORD* been revealed?” (**Isaiah 52:10 & 53:1** NKJV)
      - c. “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the *mouth of the LORD* has spoken.” (**Isaiah 40:5**, NKJV)
      - d. “For the *eyes of the LORD* are on the righteous, And *His ears* are open to their prayers; But the *face of the LORD* is against those who do evil.” (**1 Peter 3:12**, NKJV)
    2. **Question:** Does God (the Father) have *literal* eyes, ears, mouth, face, hands, arms and fingers, as we humans have? Or is this kind of language used in a more *figurative* or poetic sense?
      - a. Consider this one: “Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me *under the shadow of Your wings*....” (**Psalms 17:8**, NKJV; designated **Psalms 16:8** in the LXX)
      - b. **Question:** Does God literally have *wings, like a bird*? Do they *cast a shadow*?
        - i. Regarding this passage in **Psalms 17**, I believe all of us would acknowledge that the Lord is

speaking figuratively! Clearly He does not have actual wings, but is using poetic language here.

- ii. I see this as similar to when Jesus says He would like to gather His people as a hen gathers chicks under her wings.
  - 1. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!” (**Luke 13:34**, NKJV)
- c. God (the Father) is Spirit, dwelling in unapproachable light and having no material form nor limitation. Therefore God (the Father) *cannot have a material body* as humans do.
  - i. “God *is Spirit*, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (**John 4:24**, NKJV)
  - ii. Paul describes the Father as “...the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, *dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see*, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.” (**1 Timothy 6:15–16**, NKJV)
- d. While the Son of God (the Word of God) can take on a physical body (as the Word became flesh in the incarnation of Jesus), the Father cannot. The Father and Son (and Spirit) share the same divine nature, yet are distinct persons with different personal attributes as we see regarding physical form.
  - i. For more information regarding how early Christians understood the unity of the Father Son and Holy Spirit (as well as their distinction regarding personal attributes and order), see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, articles on ‘Trinity’, ‘Christ, Divinity of’ and ‘Father, God the’.

### III. Human Features and Emotions Attributed to God (the Father) in Scripture

- a. Many end up with a distorted view of God, from:

- i. Ignorance of or distortions of passages of Scripture;
  - ii. Bad experiences with religious leaders, church groups, parents (especially hypocrisy); and
  - iii. Misconceptions even from religious art, particularly that famous Michelangelo painting on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, *'The Creation of Adam'*, depicting God in the form of an old man who is reaching out to touch Adam. We see similar depictions in other paintings, statues, stained glass artwork, etc.
- b. We are living in an age when there are very few who have any clear sense of *who God is*. Furthermore, this seems to be *getting even worse*. We are seeing the results of that all around us: *rapid moral degeneration* in our society.
- c. I remember something that I was taught at an early age growing up in the Roman Catholic church: the reason we were created and placed here is to seek God; to come to know Him, so we can love Him and serve Him.
  - i. That is very similar to what Paul told the *unbelievers* in Athens.
    - 1. Read **Acts 17:22-28**.
    - 2. God created us and distributed people throughout the world "so that men should seek the Lord".
    - 3. We were *not* put here simply to eat, drink, enjoy as much pleasure in this life as possible and then die!
  - ii. This also is consistent with what the Hebrews writer said *to Christians*.
    - 1. Read **Hebrews 11:5-6**.
    - 2. While many think of "seeking God" as something limited to the time before we become Christians; actually, it is something that should carry forward throughout our spiritual lives.
    - 3. **Challenge to Christians:** Are you *still* seeking God?
- d. We are here to seek God; to get to know *who He really is*. Knowing who God is allows us to love Him more deeply and to better serve Him.
  - i. That is why it is so important for us to strive to have the clearest, most accurate picture of the true nature and character of God.
- e. Also, we will tend to become like those we look up to and admire. The better we see the character of God, the more like Him we will tend to become in our own character.

- i. I think of the example of my own grandson Elijah, who lives with his parents in the downstairs apartment in our two-family house. We have an old house, and I am in the process of re-shingling it with wooden shingles. This is a big project, one that is taking me several months to complete. I am up on scaffolding working on the side of the house almost every day, banging thousands of nails with a hammer to hold all the new wood shingles in place.
  - 1. My grandson looks up to me (also to his father, who works in construction as a carpenter), and shouts “bang-bang” and makes a hammering-like motion with his fist when he sees me.
  - 2. His mother (my daughter) recently gave him a toy plastic hammer. Now I hear him going all over the house hammering on everything (copying what he sees and hears his dad and his grandfather doing).
  - 3. To me, his hammering with the toy hammer all day was a small reminder of how we tend to *imitate* and become like those we look up to.
    - a. If we see God as patient, forgiving, loving, etc., this can have a practical impact on how we live our lives. *We will tend to become more like the God we worship.*
- f. Novatian, an elder in the church in Rome, writing in the 250’s AD, wrote powerfully about the nature of God (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). He addressed popular misconceptions about God and began to undertake the almost impossible task of describing God (the Father).
  - i. “He is always unbounded, because nothing is greater than He; always eternal, because nothing is more ancient than He. For that which is without beginning can be preceded by none, in that He has no time. He is on that account immortal, that He does not come to an end by any ending of his completeness. And since everything that is without beginning is without law, He excludes the mode of time by feeling Himself debtor to none. Concerning Him, therefore, and concerning those things which are of Himself, and are in Him, neither can the mind of man worthily conceive what they are, how great they are, and what they are like; nor does the eloquence of human discourse set forth a power that approaches the level of His majesty.”
  - ii. “... For should you call Him *Light*, you would be speaking of His creature rather than of Himself - you would not declare Him; or should you call Him *Strength*, you would rather be speaking of and bringing out His power than speaking of Himself; or should you call Him *Majesty*, you would rather be describing His honor than Himself.

And why should I make a long business of going through His attributes one by one?"

- iii. "... For if the keenness of our eyes grows dull on looking at the sun, so that the gaze, overcome by the brightness of the rays that meet it, cannot look upon the orb itself, the keenness of our mental perception suffers the same thing in all our thinking about God, and in proportion as we give our endeavors more directly to consider God, so much more the mind itself is blinded by the light of its own thought. For - to repeat once more - what can you worthily say of Him, who was loftier than all sublimity, and higher than all height, and deeper than all depth, and clearer than all light, and brighter than all brightness, more brilliant than all splendor, stronger than all strength, more powerful than all power, and more mighty than all might, and greater than all majesty, and more potent than all potency, and richer than all riches, more wise in all wisdom, and more benignant than all kindness, better than all goodness, juster than all justice, more merciful than all clemency? For all kinds of virtues must needs be less than Himself, who is both God and Parent of all virtues, so that it may truly be said that God is that, which is such that nothing can be compared to Him. For He is above all that can be said. For He is a certain Mind generating and filling all things, which, without any beginning or end of time, controls, by the highest and most perfect reason, the naturally linked causes of things, so as to result in benefit to all."
- iv. (Source: Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, chapter 2; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 612-613)
- g. In the same work, Novatian then goes on to discuss various human attributes (anger, hating something or someone; having eyes, fingers; seeing, hearing or smelling something) attributed to God in Scripture. Novatian addresses *in what sense* we should understand those types of references to God. Note that human sentiments like anger are considered *vices and shortcomings* on our part. What do we make of the *anger of God*? Novatian explains:
  - i. "Moreover, if we read of His wrath, and consider certain descriptions of His indignation, and learn that hatred is asserted of Him, yet we are not to understand these to be asserted of Him in the sense in which they are human vices. For all these things, although they may corrupt man, cannot at all corrupt the divine power. For such passions as these will rightly be said to be in men, and will not rightly be judged to be in God. For man may be corrupted by these things, because he can be corrupted; God may not be corrupted by them, because He cannot be corrupted. These things, forsooth, have their force which they may

exercise, but only were a material capable of impression precedes them, not where a substance that cannot be impressed precedes them.

- ii. "For that God is angry, arises from no vice in Him. But He is so for our advantage; for He is merciful even then when He threatens, because by these threats men are recalled to rectitude. For fear is necessary for those who want the motive to a virtuous life, that they who have forsaken reason *may at least be moved by terror*. And thus all those, eitherangers of God or hatreds, or whatever they are of this kind, being displayed for our medicine, - as the case teaches, - have arisen of wisdom, not from vice, nor do they originate in from frailty; wherefore also they cannot avail for the corruption of God.
- iii. "For the diversity in us of the materials of which we consist, is accustomed to arouse the discord of anger which corrupts us; but this, whether of nature or of defect, cannot subsist in God, seeing that He is known to be constructed assuredly of no associations of bodily parts. For He is simple and without any corporeal commixture, being wholly of that essence, which, whatever it be, - He alone knows, - constitutes His being, since he is called *Spirit*. And thus those things which in men are faulty and corrupting, since they arise from the corruptibility of the body, and matter itself, in God cannot exert the force of corruptibility, since, as we have said, they have come, not of vice, but of reason.
- iv. "And although the heavenly Scripture often turns the divine appearance into a human form, - as when it says, 'the *eyes* of the Lord are over the righteous' (**Psalm 34:15**); or when it says, 'The Lord God *smelled* the smell of a good savor' (**Genesis 8:21**); or when there are given to Moses the tables 'written with the *finger* of God' (**Exodus 31:18**); or when the people of the children of Israel are set free from the land of Egypt 'with a mighty *hand* and with an *outstretched arm*' (**Psalm 136:12**); or when it says 'The *mouth* of the Lord has spoken these things' (**Isaiah 1:20**); or when the earth is set forth as 'God's *footstool*' (**Isaiah 66:1**); or when it says, 'Incline your *ear* and hear' (**2 Kings 19:16**) - we who say that the law is spiritual do not include with these lineaments [*features*] of our bodily nature any mode or figure of the divine majesty, but diffuse that character of unbounded magnitude (so to speak) over its plains without any limit.
- v. "For it is written, 'If I shall ascend into heaven You are there; if I shall descend into hell [*Hebrew = Sheol; Greek = Hades*], You are there also; if I shall take my wings, and go away across the sea, there Your hand shall lay hold of me, and Your right hand shall hold me' (**Psalm 139:8-10**). For we recognize the plan of the divine Scripture according to the proportion of its arrangement.

- vi. "For the prophet then was still speaking about God *in parables* according to the period of the faith, *not as God was, but as the people were able to receive Him*. And thus, that such things as these should be said about God, must be imputed not to God, but rather *to the people*. Thus the people are permitted to erect a tabernacle, and yet God is not contained within the enclosure of a tabernacle. Thus a temple is reared, and yet God is not at all bounded within the restraints of the temple. It is not therefore God who is limited, *but the perception of the people is limited*; nor is God straitened [*made narrow, confined*], but the understanding of the reason of the people is held to be straitened.
- vii. "Finally, in the gospel the Lord said, 'The hour shall come when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father' (**John 4:21**); and gave the reasons, saying, 'God is a Spirit; and those therefore who worship, must worship in spirit and in truth' (**John 4:24**). Thus the divine agencies are there exhibited by means of members; it is not the appearance of God nor the bodily lineaments that are described. For when the eyes are spoken of, it is implied that He sees all things; and when the ear, it is set forth that He hears all things; and when the finger, a certain energy of His will is opened up; and when the nostrils, His recognition of prayers is shown forth as of odors; and when the hand, it is proved that He is the author of every creature; and when the arm, is it is announced that no nature can withstand the power of His arm; and when the feet, it is unfolded that He fills all things, and that there is not any place where God is not.
- viii. "For neither members nor their offices of members are needful to Him to whose sole judgment, even unexpressed, all things serve and are present. For why should He require eyes who was Himself the light? Or why should He ask for feet who was everywhere? Or why should He wish to go when there is nowhere where He can go beyond Himself? Or why should He seek for hands whose will is, even when silent, the architect for the foundation of all things?
- ix. "He needs no ears who knows the wills that are even unexpressed; or for what reason should He need a tongue whose thought is a command? These members assuredly were necessary to men, but not to God, because man's design would be ineffectual if the body did not fulfill the thought. Moreover, they are not needful to God, whose will the works attend not so much without any effort, as that the works themselves proceed simultaneously with the will.
- x. "Moreover, He Himself is all eye, because He all sees; and all ear, because He all hears; and all hand, because He all works; and all foot, because He all is everywhere. For He is the same, whatever it is. He is all equal, and all everywhere. For He has not in Him any diversity in



Himself, being simple. For those are the things which are reduced to diversity of members, which arise from birth and go to dissolution. But things which are not concrete cannot be conscious of these things. And what is immortal, whatever it is, that very thing is one and simple and forever. And thus, because it is one it cannot be dissolved; since whatever is that very thing which is placed beyond the claim of dissolution; it is freed from the laws of death.”

- xi. (Source: Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, chapters 5-6; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 615-616)
- xii. To sum up the case made here by Novatian:
  - 1. Novatian provides us with an extraordinary attempt to provide a sense of the nature and character of God, the Father, who is beyond the comprehension of our human minds.
  - 2. The characteristics of God are explained in parable-like terms, so that we humans can relate and begin to understand.
  - 3. It is not God who is limited, but rather it is *our perception* that is limited.
  - 4. When it speaks of his finger, it means, “a certain energy of His is opened up”.
  - 5. God the Father has no need of diverse body parts! *In that sense*, His nature is simple (all One), as opposed to consisting of many constituent parts (as we humans are).
- h. Novatian concludes (in chapter 7 of the same work) that God *is not limited* by any of the descriptive statements in Scripture, such as where it says:
  - i. God is *Spirit* (**John 4**);
  - ii. God is *love* (**1 John 4:8**); or
  - iii. God is *light* (**1 John 1:5**).
    - 1. (Note that the above are all limited, created things)
    - 2. Many limit God to one or more of the above to assert that since God is love, no one will perish (all will be saved, there cannot be a hell, He will overlook sexuality immorality and homosexuality, etc.).
  - iv. Also, let us never forget one other “God is... (fill-in-the-blank)” statement in Scripture: Our God is “*a consuming fire*”! (**Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29**)

#### IV. Back to the “Finger of God” Reference

- a. **Question:** Since God (the Father) *doesn’t have a physical hand or finger*, what does the expression “finger of God” refer to?
  - i. As discussed in the section we read from chapter 6 in *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, Novatian believed the expression meant “a certain energy of His is opened up”.
- b. **Question:** Where is this term “the finger of God” found elsewhere in the Bible, in a way that might shed more light on what this term could be referring to?
  - i. Read **Exodus 8:16-19** (designated **Exodus 8:12-15** in OSB LXX).
    1. Pharaoh’s sorcerers are using the expression “finger of God” to refer to the ability of God to perform a miracle which they could not duplicate by their occult arts nor by trickery.
  - ii. Read **Luke 11:16-20** where Jesus uses the expression, as well as the parallel passage in **Matthew 12:22-28**.
    1. “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with *the finger of God*, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (**Luke 11:19-20**, NKJV)
    2. “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by *the Spirit of God*, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (**Matthew 12:27-28**, NKJV)
    3. It appears that Jesus is equating “the finger of God” with the Spirit of God, *the Holy Spirit*!
      - a. By similar comparison of parallel texts, we understand that the expressions “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” refer to the same thing.
    4. This idea that the term “finger of God” in **Exodus 31:18** refers to the *Holy Spirit* makes sense (to me). In particular:
      - a. The Holy Spirit is the power by which the Father (and Son) perform miracles.
      - b. Since it was the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures through the prophets (**Nehemiah 9:30**, **Mark 12:36**, **Acts 28:25**, **2 Timothy 3:16-17** and **2 Peter 1:20-21**),

it certainly seems reasonable that it would be *the Spirit* who wrote the 10 Commandments on the stone tablets!