



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V26 N19

May 12, 2024

“Bear Cubs and Eagle’s Wings”

Numbers 11:12; Hosea 11:3-4; Deuteronomy 32:10-11;
Hosea 13:8; Isaiah 49:15-16

THIS WEEK’S CORE COMPETENCY

Personal God

I believe God is involved
in and cares about my
daily life.

*“I lift up my eyes to the
mountains – where does my
help come from? My help
comes from the LORD, the
Maker of heaven and earth.”*

Psalm 121:1-2



What is God
like?

“God is spirit” – that’s what Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:24) – which implies that God does not have a material body, a notion confirmed by Jesus’ words to his disciples following his resurrection. One theologian writes: “When he appeared to them in his glorified body, they could hardly believe their eyes. They thought he was a ghost, an immaterial spirit. Jesus showed them his hands and feet, and to reassure them that they were not seeing a spirit or imagining something, he said (Luke 24:39), ‘See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a *spirit does not have flesh and bones* as you see that I have.’ A similar sort of disjunction between flesh (material) and spirit (immaterial) appears in Isa. 31:3 as Isaiah pleads with his people not to fear the Egyptians but to trust in God. For after all, ‘the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit’ (NIV). These phrases set up parallel antitheses between men and God on the one hand, and flesh and spirit on the other. God is not man and spirit is not flesh. Men and horses are flesh, but God is spirit” (John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 216, italics added).

As to his *essence*, God is pure spirit without matter and hence invisible. Unlike human beings, he does not have a physical body (i.e., he is incorporeal), which means God is neither male nor female – even though male and female imagery is used to describe him. How then are passages that speak of God’s body parts, e.g., “hands” (Ex 3:20; Dt 33:3; Ps 139:10; Isa 65:2; Heb 1:10; 10:31), “eyes” (1Ki 8:29; 2Ch 16:9; Pr 15:3; Am 9:8; Ze 4:10; 12:4), “ears” (Ne 1:6; Isa 37:17; 59:1; Ps 34:15), “face” (Ge 19:13; Ps 17:15; 34:16; 80:3; Ex 33:11; Nu 12:8), to be understood? Such references are *anthropomorphic* figures of speech that speak of some divine attribute or action in terms that employ human body parts.

“Since we know how those physical parts function in the human body, we understand that the writer is drawing an analogy between what humans do in virtue of those parts of their physical body and what God is and does” (Feinberg, 221).

When it comes to imagery used to describe God, such as, “father” (Hos 11:1; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 31:9; Mal 3:17), “husband” (Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14, 20; 31:32; Hos 3:1-3), and “friend” (Jer 3:4; 2Ch 20:7; Isa 41:8), the feminine images are the least familiar. The same theologian cites the following Old Testament examples: “God is also characterized metaphorically as *mother*. In Deut 32:18 the Jews are accused of neglecting the rock who *begot* them and forgetting the God who *gave them birth*. Isaiah speaks of a coming day and records God’s word to Israel (Isa 66:13): ‘As one whom his *mother* comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.’ In Isa 49:14-15 we see that though Israel thought God had forsaken her, God responds by asking, ‘Can a *woman* forget her *nursing child*, and have no compassion on the *son of her womb*? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.’ God’s love for his people is likened to a *mother’s* love for her *child nursing at her breast*. See also Isa 42:14, where the Lord says that things will change for Israel: ‘I have kept silent for a long time, I have kept still and restrained Myself. Now like a *woman in labor* I will groan, I will both gasp and pant.’ And Jesus likens his desire for communion with Israel to the way a *mother hen* gathers her chicks (Matt 23:37)” (Feinberg, 56-57, italics added).

These images do not speak of God’s gender; he is neither male nor female. They do, however, describe his behavior in gendered terms that express how he relates to his people – as a father, a mother, a husband, and a friend.

1

EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read the following passages:

Numbers 11:12

12 *Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth?
Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse
carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their
ancestors?*

Hosea 11:3-4

3 *It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.*
4 *I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love.
To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.*

Deuteronomy 32:10-11

10 *In a desert land he found him,
in a barren and howling waste.
He shielded him and cared for him;
he guarded him as the apple of his eye,*
11 *like an eagle that stirs up its nest
and hovers over its young,
that spreads its wings to catch them
and carries them aloft.*

Hosea 13:8

8 *Like a bear robbed of her cubs,
I will attack them and rip them open;
like a lion I will devour them –
a wild animal will tear them apart.*

Isaiah 49:15-16

15 *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!
16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are ever before me.*

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

Numbers 11:12

- Bracket the three *rhetorical* questions in v. 12.
- Circle "promised" in v. 12.

Hosea 11:3-4

- Circle "Ephraim" in v. 3.
- Circle "healed" in v. 3.
- Box "like one who" indicating *comparison* in v. 4.

Deuteronomy 32:10-11

- Circle "he" and "him" in v. 10.
- Box "like an eagle" indicating *comparison* in v. 11.

Hosea 13:8

- Box "like a bear" and "like a lion" indicating *comparison* in v. 8.
- Circle "them" (4x) in v. 8.

Isaiah 49:15-16

- Bracket the *rhetorical* question in v. 15.
- Box "though" indicating *contrast* in v. 15.
- Circle "you/your" (3x) in vv. 15-16.
- Underline "engraved you on the palms of my hands" in v. 16.

What imagery stands out to you in these passages?

What one thing do you not understand in these passages?

Identify a **THEME** running through these passages. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

Numbers 11:12

1. What was Moses telling God in his first two rhetorical questions?
2. What was he telling God in his third rhetorical question?
3. Identify the image used to describe God in verse 12. How is he portrayed?

Hosea 11:3-4

4. Identify the image used to describe God in verses 3-4. How is he portrayed?
5. What is conveyed about God through that image?

Deuteronomy 32:10-11

6. Summarize verse 10.
7. Explain the *comparison* in verse 11.

Hosea 13:8

8. Explain the parallel *comparisons* in verse 8.

Isaiah 49:15-16

9. Transform the *rhetorical* question in verse 15 into a *declarative* statement.
10. The LORD has "Israel" tattooed on the palms of his hands, indicating what?

Commentary On The Text

This issue of *The Scrolls* addresses five *canonically* unrelated passages that are *thematically* connected in this way. They all use *gendered* imagery to describe God – more specifically, they use what might be called *feminine* or *maternal* metaphors and similes to describe him. Mother’s Day provides an appropriate occasion to recapture the biblical maternal images for God in order to better understand what he is like. Keep in mind that the Bible describes God in *feminine* terms, not because God is actually a woman (see page 1), but because *feminine* or *maternal* traits portray something true about God and how people experience him. The same must be said about *masculine* and *paternal* images for God – for we must not confuse what is *figuratively* true with what is *literally* true regarding God’s reality. The following five passages will be examined: Numbers 11:12; Hosea 11:3-4; Deuteronomy 32:10-11; Hosea 13:8; Isaiah 49:15-16.

Numbers 11:12. Moses is fed up – fed up with the Israelites’ incessant “wailing at the entrance to their tents” (v. 10), an expression of their dissatisfaction with God’s provision of *manna*. “Give us *meat* to eat,” they demand of Moses (v. 13), who by now is thinking that it’s better to die than bear the burden of their ingratitude (v. 15) and is wondering what he has done to deserve their ire and to be so treated by God (v. 11). Moses asks three *rhetorical* questions using *maternal* imagery in verse 12, all intended to turn the tables on the LORD. The first two, which allude to the exodus from Egypt, might be transformed into declarative statements and paraphrased, “You, LORD, conceived them, not me,” and “You, LORD, gave birth to them, not me.” The two statements imply that the Israelites are the LORD’s problem, and yet, he, Moses, is the one carrying them in his arms “like a mother carries a nursing baby” (NLT). As far as he is concerned, the LORD should be the one carrying the LORD’s people to the land the LORD promised them.

Hosea 11:3-4. Hosea 11:1 reads, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Having given birth to the nation in the exodus, the LORD goes on to describe the behavior of his wayward son, who turned away from him to serve idols. The nation’s sin is made all the greater by the LORD’s description of how he treated them. He was a good *father*. Interestingly, the LORD describes his *good* treatment of his *son* using *feminine maternal* imagery. It is mothers who teach their children to walk while fathers are away at work (v. 3), mothers who tend to

their children’s cuts and bruises (c. 3), mothers who raise them with love and tenderness (v. 4), and mothers who hold them close as they feed them (v. 4). Tragically, God’s son repaid his father’s kindness with ingratitude.

Deuteronomy 32:10-11. In these verses, only a snippet of his long song (32:1-43), Moses reflects on the early days of the LORD’s relationship to his son, Israel. Verse 10 speaks of the LORD finding him in Egypt – a “barren and howling waste” (v. 10) in *comparison* to a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5; cf. Nu 13:27) to which he would bring him. Along the way, the LORD “shielded and cared for him” because he was “the apple of his eye.” Put differently, “He continually protected him like the pupil of his eye” (NET). What’s more, *like (maternal comparison)* a *mother eagle* – thought to be the one that taught its young to fly by forcing them out of the nest – the LORD taught his exiled son, now the fledgling nation of Israel, how to stand on its own in the wilderness. And, of course, was there to “catch them” (v. 11) whenever necessary.

Hosea 13:8. Although the LORD redeemed them from Egypt (v. 4) and provided for them for generations in the land (vv. 5-6), they became satisfied, then proud, and in the end forgot him (v. 6). Therefore, terrible judgment is announced (vv. 7-8). Here, we see that the maternal instinct to protect the children, likened to that of a she-bear and lioness (v. 8), can produce wrath as much as warmth. The LORD’s *judging action* is as destructive as the attacks of those animals. No sentimental mother-image here. “And we can have no doubt that the Assyrian siege, destruction, and deportation of the inhabitants of Ephraim were indeed that destructive (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:5-6, 18, 24)” (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, NIBC, 103).

Isaiah 49:15-16. The LORD speaks these words in response to Zion’s (i.e., Israel’s) accusation that he has forgotten her given the fact she is facing future exile (v. 14). Verse 15 contains a *compound rhetorical* question and a *contrast*. The point of the rhetorical question and contrast using *feminine maternal* imagery can be stated as follows: A *mother* cannot forget the baby at her breast, neither can she withhold compassion from the child she has borne. Still, she may forget, but I will not forget you. Verse 16 explains that figuratively speaking, the LORD has “Zion” tattooed on the palms of his hands, making it impossible for him to forget her.

Word Studies/Notes

Numbers 11:12

v. 12 *Did I . . .* The three rhetorical questions, questions asked to create a dramatic effect or to make a point rather than to get an answer, that were asked by Moses imply that “the Lord conceived the people of Israel, that he was their nurse and that their promises were his” (*The NIV Study Bible* note on Nu 11:12), which is Moses’ point.

v. 12 *promised* God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham (Ge 15:18-21) and later confirmed his promise to Isaac (Ge 26:2-6) and to Jacob (Ge 28:13-15). And later when he and then Joseph died in Egypt, they both demanded that Canaan be their final resting place (Ge 49:29-33; 50:5, 12-13 and Ge 50:24-25).

Hosea 11:3-4

v. 3 *Ephraim* “Israel’s largest tribe (see notes on 9:11; 13:1), whose name came to be used of the northern kingdom as whole” (*The NIV Study Bible* note on Hos 4:17).

v. 3 *healed* A reference to the removal of discipline and restoration of the nation following their repentance (5:12-13; 6:1). “Given the context, this healing has the meaning of deliverance from political disaster (cf. 6:1; 7:1)” (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, NIBC, 94).

v. 4 *like one who . . .* Cf. “I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them” (NIV©1984); cf. (NASB; cf. ESV, NET). “But many have questioned whether this verse reverts to the figure of an animal, with a yoke, as in 4:16 and 10:11, or whether the Hebrew ‘*ōl* should be read as ‘*ûl*, ‘baby.’ The emendation would then read, ‘And I was to them as those who lift a baby to their cheek, and I bent down to feed him’ . . . There is no way to decide definitively between these two readings, but in either case, the tenderness of Yahweh toward Israel is indicated” (Achtemeier, 93, 94). The NIV©2011 translates the emended reading.

Deuteronomy 32:10-11

vv. 10-11 *he, him* The pronoun “he” refers to the LORD (cf. vv. 9, 12); the pronoun “him” refers to “Jacob” (v. 9), referring according to the parallelism to “the LORD’s people,” namely, “they” and “them” referred to in the rest of the chapter.

v. 11 *like an eagle . . .* “Apparently the eagle taught its young to fly by throwing one out of the nest, and then swooping down and allowing the young bird to alight on its mother’s wings. The poetry illustrates vividly God’s dealing with his people, casting them from security to the fierce wilderness, but remaining beneath them to give them strength for the fearful

experience, and gradually teaching them to ‘fly’ on their own” (Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT, 381). “The metaphor of the **eagle** speaks of God’s wise and loving parental care. As an eagle must force **its young** out of the nest if they are to learn to fly and fend for themselves, so **the LORD . . . led** His people into the harsh life of Egyptian bondage and afterward through wilderness wandering that they might become strong. And like an eagle, the Lord remained ready to ‘catch them’ when necessary” (Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 318).

Hosea 13:8

v. 8 *like a bear . . . lion* “In view of Israel’s behavior [cf. vv. 1-6], the LORD promised to behave like an enemy of His people, like a lion or leopard that laid in wait to attack a sheep grazing in rich pasture (v. 6). He would confront them like a mother bear crazed by the loss of her cubs (cf. 2 Sam. 17:8; Prov. 17:12). He would tear them open like a bear and consume them like a lioness. He would “tear open their chests,” literally “the enclosure of the heart.” The lion, leopard, and bear were all wild animals native to Canaan that were notorious for their relentless manner of killing prey” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Hosea,” 2024 ed., 100, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/hosea.pdf).

vv. 8-9 *them* I.e., “Ephraim” (v. 1), “Israel” (v. 9).

Isaiah 49:15-16

v. 15 *Can a mother . . .* Rhetorical questions can usually be transformed into declarative statements, e.g., “A mother cannot forget the baby at her breast and will always have compassion on the child she has borne” (see note on Nu 11:12).

v. 15 *though* Note the *contrast*. “Human mothers may possibly neglect the children they care so much for that they nurse, *though this is unnatural*. They may even stop showing compassion to the children they carry in their wombs for nine months, *though this is inconsistent*” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Isaiah,” 2024 ed., 344, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf).

v. 16 *engraved . . .* “Some servants inscribed the names of their masters on their hands in Isaiah’s day, but masters did not write the names of their servants on their hands. Yet Yahweh had written (lit. engraved, cf. Ezek. 4:1) the name of Zion on His palms so that He would never forget her, but be reminded of her frequently. The profile (skyline) of the city was constantly in His thoughts” (Constable, 344).

4

APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

The LORD is often portrayed in *feminine maternal* terms in the Old Testament to show his love, concern, care, compassion, and loyalty to his people.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

On good days we take the best of our parents into our marriage, and on bad days the worst. I think this is also true for parenting. I looked at my parents and sifted out the bad but clung to the good. I had a pretty concrete idea of what kind of mom I wanted to be and set up a solid plan for myself. Then I had kids. I remember saying I didn't want my kids watching lots of TV; then I figured out Elmo was a fabulous babysitter, and I could get a shower. I was a latchkey kid and didn't want my kids to spend a lot of time home alone; then I realized the beauty of going to the grocery store unattended. Every time I drew a line in the sand about kids' expected behaviors and personal parenting style, things would happen that forced me to recognize why my parents did what they did. After my fourth child was born, I remember calling my mom and telling her how sorry I was for all the pain I caused her as a child and especially as a teenager. Being a mom isn't easy, but it brings joy for which there are no words. We're vigilant advocates, calendar queens, loudest in the cheering section, fierce protectors and the first to offer a hug and a Band-Aid. This tenderness a mother has for her child is an expression of God's good character. Moms, it can be a challenge, but worth it. Keep up the good work of showing God's love to your kids.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Hos 11:3-4; Dt 32:10-11

1. What did God teach Ephraim to do and how?
2. What did God lead Ephraim?
3. From the Deuteronomy passage, what did God think about the Israelites?

What Do You Think?

What does it mean to be the apple of someone's eye?

What Do You Do?

What are the character traits you find about God in this passage? How does your mom show these character traits?

CORE COMPETENCY: Personal God

I believe God cares about everything in my life.

MEMORY VERSE: Ephesians 3:20-21

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory."

KidPIXCOUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- I completed my Bible Study
- I memorized this week's verse
- I brought my Bible to church
- I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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