

B14: TRANSCENDENCE

(Known also as ‘Lofty Detachment’)

B14.1 Prelude

The wise man begins his prayers by heartily acknowledging the greatness of God but the foolish man thinks that by making many prayers he is doing the Almighty some sort of favour

B14.2 Definition

This barely shared attribute of God’s ‘*transcendence*’ refers to His lofty detachment from Creation and His existence over and above it.

Divine lofty detachment is implied by the name **Elohim Marom** – meaning ‘*God most High.*’ An example of this name being used in scripture occurs in Micah 6:6, which reads, “*Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the High God (Elohim Marom)? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?*” It demonstrates that God can, at times, seem very remote.

B14.3 Bible Exposition

Two further Bible passages demonstrating the existence of this attribute are 2 Chronicles 2:6 and Matthew 6:9.

2 Chronicles 2:6

“And who is able to build Him a house, seeing the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a house, except only to burn sacrifices before Him?”

King Solomon is on the brink of building a Temple, which will be characterised by its many elaborate sacrifices. Paradoxically, He sees the inherent limitations of this project but He still goes ahead with it out of a genuine desire to honour the Lord. Also acknowledged is the fact that God fills both this Universe and another unknown Universe, which is His dwelling place. Scripture does support the view that more than one Cosmos exists. Yet in His transcendence the Lord goes beyond His Creation and stretches out for an unlimited distance. The effect of such a fact should generate a sense of humility within each one of us. We are to avoid any pagan notion that God is tied to one locality – He’s not; His lofty detachment also helps us to see our own works from a realistic perspective. Like King Solomon, we are to accept that even our best works are only on a miniscule scale when compared to the works of God. Any significance they have is tied directly to our relationship with God. Hence, even the smallest works done in accordance with His will take on a huge significance. Thus a humble cleaner of public toilets who’s following the Lord’s will is in a far happier position than a proud Cardinal overlooking the building of a grand Cathedral in order to fulfil his lust for personal glory.

Matthew 6:9

“After that manner you are to pray ‘Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name.’”

These words represent a marvellous opening to the Lord’s Prayer. The first divine attribute Jesus draws attention to isn’t divine holiness, but divine transcendence. He seems to assume that focusing upon this attribute will instil the right attitude of worship. We begin prayer by recognising the greatness of divine transcendence. Thus Christ shows that the fundamental need in prayer is to begin by focussing our attention upon God and not on ourselves. ‘*Me*’ centred prayers are dangerous, precisely because they encourage the worship of ‘*self.*’ In addition, it is helpful to see that divine transcendence allows scope for divine holiness. Through a lofty detachment from Creation the Lord is seen to be separate from all that is evil (even though He freely chose to identify with sin through Christ). Once again the presence of one divine attribute allows for the presence of another. God can be holy because He is transcendent.

When viewed alongside Micah 6:6, these two passages show that: -

- 1) The Lord humbles people through a revelation of His own transcendence
- 2) The Lord dwells outside of His Creation
- 3) The Lord can choose to be separate from the evil found present in His Creation

B14.4 Application

In response to God's '*lofty detachment*' believers would be wise to: -

- 1) Avoid thinking that impressive religious ceremonies do any favours for God
- 2) Acknowledge that God cannot be tied to one locality
- 3) Begin any prayer with an acknowledgement of divine transcendence

At the close of this study, it is reasonable to conclude that God is both able to fill and to go beyond His Creation

B14.5 Conclusion

- 1) Divine '*transcendence*' shows that God may deal with the sin of apostasy by determinedly enforcing his standards, regardless of those having turned against Him
- 2) At His Son's death God the Father demonstrated this attribute by removing His comforting presence from His Son as He suffered the penalty for our sin

For further study please refer to the words '*High*' or '*Most High*' in any Bible Concordance or Dictionary

B14.6 Epilogue

*Lord, do not be far from me
Or so high that you are beyond reach
I am exhausted,
Renew me with a vision of yourself and
Cause me once again to be effective in your service¹*

B14.7 Questions

- 1) What effect should divine transcendence have on our prayer life?
- 2) What are the dangers of over-emphasising divine transcendence?
- 3) How can we ensure that our prayers and worship are '*God-centred*' rather than '*self-centred*'?

¹ This prayer was first made on Tuesday, 22nd February 2000. It expresses the need to receive a fresh vision of God during times of exhaustion and illness.