

## What does anthropomorphism mean regarding God?

The Bible, though inspired by God, was written over hundreds of years by people of differing personalities to people in many walks of life. God used these personalities to give character to the books of the Bible so there are many different literary styles. Some writers were natural poets who used figures of speech; others were stern prophets using colourful imagery, while others were historians and teachers who wrote plainly. All these styles appear in scripture.

In explaining the mysteries of God's attributes (character) it was necessary to use many types of literary style to engage the minds of all, from the very simple to the most intellectual. Much teaching about God is straightforward doctrinal statement, or didactic writing. However, on many occasions a writer uses anthropomorphism to help explain God's character or actions. This means attributing human characteristics to God to make a point. This is why God is said to have eyes, ears, face, hands and feet. God cannot have a physical body because he is a spirit; he is perfection in an immaterial, eternal form. But saying that God's eyes run to and from over the earth (2 Chron 16:9) is a figurative way of saying that God sees everything. Saying that God works with his hands (Isa 45:11-12) is an emphatic way of referring to his specific creative powers.

In a similar way God is said to remember things like his covenant (Gen 9:15). No perfect God can forget anything and must know all things, but this is said to emphasise his eternal friendship as a result of his covenant, that he will never forget it. God also remembers the wickedness of the reprobate and will punish their lawlessness (Hos 7:2) affirming that evil deeds are not hidden from God.

God also is said to have emotions like men using what is called anthropopathic figures of speech. Now God does not behave like men because his personality is perfect; but our finite minds cannot comprehend the depths of God's character and such terms help to explain God's priorities. Thus God is said to relent or change his mind. God does not change and thus cannot change his mind, but such statements illustrate certain actions of God (see 'Does God change his mind'). God is also said to be jealous and angry at defection, taking revenge (Exod 20:5; Ps 69:24, 94:1; Isa 30:27, 63:3; Nah 1:2), and also to love like a mother or a father (Isa 66:13; Ps 103:13).

So God does not actually sleep, run, walk the earth, forget or relent; these are merely anthropomorphic and anthropopathic figures of speech to help us simple people of limited thinking understand the depths of God.

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