

I. Hebrew YHWH Identity VS Greek Philosophy

There is a multitude of ideas that come to the human mind today when we discuss what or who God is. In light of this we may find our conception does not exactly align with what the Bible says about the One we worship. The starting point of our journey must be to determine the Hebrew conception of the one true God as presented in the Old Testament, rather than the philosophical ideas that permeate our 21st century thinking.

- A. The real issue at hand in our study today is what “God” actually means. To say that the forefathers of our faith believed in one God (Monotheism) vs. the common belief in their day, which were multiple Gods (Polytheism) does not actually address our question. We must understand through the scriptures the view of God and how He was differentiated from all other reality through both His incommunicable and communicable attributes.

“It is important to begin by clarifying the question. When people ask “Was Jesus God?” they usually think they know what the word “God” means, and are asking whether we can fit Jesus into that. I regard this as deeply misleading.” – N.T. Wright

- B. Scripture and Hebraic thought is concerned with the identity of God rather than the prevailing Greek view of the nature or essence of God. In other words, the Hebrew mind asks “Who is God?” the Greek mind asks “What is God?”
 - 1. The Greek concept of God comes from the foundation of Platonic Dualism which reasons from the philosophy that the divine is totally opposite of the created. Metaphysical attribute examples include ingenerate, incorruptible, immutable, impassible, infinite, incorporeal, invisible, etc.
 - 2. While some of these qualities do have some biblical correlation, the basis of Greek perspective of God is derived from the difference He has from humanity and the world we live in. It is no wonder that the majority of believer’s today struggle with the lie that God is indifferent, stoic, and unreachable.
- C. We must draw our conclusions from portions of Scripture such as the Pentateuch and prophetic writings and see that there were several profound ways; beautiful in their simplicity that God was distinguished from all other reality.

II. The Scriptural Divine Identity

- A. There are specific characteristics of Scriptural Monotheism that can be divided into 5 general categories.

1. **Creator and Sustainer of Everything** – This is the fact that the One and only true God acted alone and unaided in the creation of all things both visible and invisible. In addition to creating all things He also alone and unaided sustains all things. (Gen. 1-2, Job 26:7-14, Ps. 33:6, 90:2, 102:25-27, 104:24-25, 136:4-9, Neh. 9:6, Is. 40:26,28, 42:5, 44:24, 45:6-7, 45:12, 48:13, 51:16, Jer. 10:12-16, Amos 4:16, Acts 4:24, 17:24-25, Heb. 11:3, Rev. 4:11)

“The Scriptural proof for the doctrine of creation is not found in a single and limited portion of the Bible, but is found in every part of the Word of God. It does not consist of a few scattered passages of doubtful interpretation, but of a large number of clear and unequivocal statements, which speak of the creation of the world as a historical fact.” - Louis Berkhof

2. **Sovereign Ruler of all Things** – God alone possesses all rights over everything and everyone. Though He may use servants to accomplish His purposes, He alone sits on the Governmental throne over all things. He is the one writing the narrative of redemption and guiding its steps. The scriptures often use the imagery of height to address this attribute of God. (1 Chron. 29:10-12, Job 22:12, Ps. 24:1, 33:6-11, 47:2,7-8, 103:19, Is. 40:15, 23, 46:9-10, 57:15, Dan. 4:34-35)
3. **Covenant Maker and Keeper** – God’s covenant with Israel and His faithfulness to that covenant is another scriptural aspect of His unique identity. His merciful actions and dealings with Israel will bring substance to our conception of what God is like. The pinnacle example of this was His deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and scripture points to this over and over as one of the main ways that He defines who He is. He is the one who rescued a people from the house of bondage to set them apart as Holy. (Ex. 6:6, 20:2, Deut. 4:32-39, 7:8-9, 1 Kin. 8:23, Is. 43:15-17, Lk 1:72-73)

“Classic Jewish monotheism, then, believed that (a) there was one God, who created heaven and earth and who remained in close and dynamic relation with his creation; and that (b) this God had called Israel to be his special people. This twin belief, tested to the limit and beyond through Israel’s checkered career, was characteristically expressed through a particular narrative: the chosen people were also the rescued people, liberated from slavery in Egypt, marked out by the gift of Torah, established in their land, exiled because of disobedience, but promised a glorious return and final settlement. Jewish-style monotheism meant living in this story and trusting in this one true God, the God of creation and covenant, of Exodus and Return.” – N.T. Wright

4. **The Divine Name “YHWH”** – Only the one true God bears and upholds the divine name of Yahweh. He has revealed Himself simply as “The One Who Is” the “I AM”. The Divine Name was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:5-7) and appears over and over again in the scriptures. YHWH, God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Deut. 5:10, 2 Chron. 30:9, Neh. 9:17, Ps. 86:5,15, 89:8, 103:8-13, Dan. 9:9, Joel 2:13, Mic 7:18, Jhn 17:6,26, Ps. 22:22)

5. **The Only One Worthy of Worship** – The last component of the unique identity of God as revealed by the scriptures is the exclusive worship that His identity necessitated. The practice of worshipping Him alone dramatically set apart His people from the other peoples of the earth. (Ex. 20:3, Deut. 6:4-6,13, 2 Kin. 17:35-36, Ps. 96:4-6, Is. 42:8, Zech. 14:16, Mat. 4:10)

“The more flexible readiness of non-Jewish religion to accommodate many deities (and also human objects of cultic devotion such as rulers) was portrayed by devout Jews as utter stupidity and the worst of many corrupt features of Gentiles...For devout Jews, the core requirement of Judaism was the exclusive worship of Israel’s God...God was to be worshiped, and worship was to be withheld from any of these figures [agents of God’s work, i.e. angels]. I contend that this was the decisive and clearest expression of what we call Jewish “monotheism”. – L. Hurtado

III. Typical Theological Attributes

- A. Now that we have the biblical perspective of the unique identity of God the question becomes, what do we do with the traditional attributes of God that we have come to know? For the most part there is no tension when we look at the historic communicable attributes of God. It is however difficult to synthesize the incommunicable attributes of God that stem from Greek theology (im’s, ums, omni’s) into the biblical God.
 1. The importance of viewing God in a scriptural way cannot be overstated. Beyond general concern for biblical accuracy, the way we think of Him both theologically and devotionally has huge implications. One of the chief reasons our hearts don’t immediately rest in the safety of relationship when approaching theology is because of our false Greek conception of God.
 2. Naturally we are wired to relate to an identity or person. Our heart will not relate to a metaphysical abstraction. This common view (metaphysical abstraction) has severe ramifications on our pursuit of intimacy, and makes it almost impossible to have a right view of biblical eschatology.

3. In scriptural thought, His supremacy and holiness were not at all at odds with a shockingly tangible God seated upon a very real throne in the highest of heavens. In fact, the more concretely we see Him, the more we will revere and love Him. (Gen. 3:8-9, 11:5-7, 18:1, 32:30, Ex. 14:24, 19:18-20, 24:10-11, 33:23, Num. 11:17, 14:6-8, Dan. 7:9-10)

IV. Embracing the Mystery of the Trinity

- B. The Trinity is one of the great mysteries of the faith yet concrete in its scriptural evidence. God is one in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three distinct persons all share the same divine nature and are in complete unity and though having separate roles are completely equal.

“I am far from pretending to explain the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all Divine mysteries still.” – John Piper

- C. Though the doctrine of the Trinity is very clear in scripture it is not a topic that God eludes to when identifying Himself. Though it is a true and a unique attribute of God it is left to speculation of how the Godhead functions. There are aspects of the mysteries of God that we are to embrace with humility and wonder. (Gen. 1:26, Is. 48:16, Mat. 3:16-17, 28:19, 1 Cor. 12:4-6, 2 Cor. 13:14, Eph. 2:18, 1 Jhn 5:7, Rev. 1:4-6)