

3a. Theology Proper – Knowing God



We frequently hear a common refrain: "My God is not like that." Even people who deny they have ANY religion have opinions about what God is like or not like.

Different religions are all around us—Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Islam—and every religion has its own set of beliefs about God. As Adonaic Christians we believe in the God of Abraham, the God and Father of Jesus Christ. But who is he, and what is he like?

We're going to go into the issues of misconceptions of God more fully at a later point so I don't want to get into a whole lot of detail now. However some common opinions of what God is like would be.

- God the cuddly grandfather
- God the avenging judge
- God the distant and uninvolved watchmaker
- God the weak and needy
- 1,871 Americans who described themselves as "Christian" were interviewed. 25% of them indicated agreement with the following two phrases:
 - "everyone is god"
 - "god is the realization of human potential"
- Although a core teaching of the Christian faith is the divinity and perfection of Jesus Christ, tens of millions of "Christians" do not accept that teaching. 22% strongly agree that Jesus Christ sinned when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat. 6% did not have an opinion.
- 38% of self-described "Christians" do not believe the Holy Spirit is a living being with a further 20% agreeing somewhat that the Holy Spirit is "a symbol of God's power or presence but not a living force."

In contrast to these wide ranging and hugely erroneous views, the prophet Isaiah provides comforting words that present a dramatic portrait of God.

- a. God is strong. (Isaiah 49:24-25)
- b. God strength establishes his rule – He is in charge. (Psalm 2:6-12; Isaiah 53:12; 59:16; Hebrews 2:14)
- c. God rewards. (Isaiah 62:11; Matthew 16:27; Luke 14:13-14; Hebrews 11:6)
- d. God comes bearing gifts. (Matthew 7:11 [cp Luke 11:13]; Luke 12:32; Romans 11:29; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4, 9, 28; Ephesians 4:8)
- e. God is protective (Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 31:23; Psalm 146:9; Isaiah 49:14-15)
 - i. He gathers lambs (Ezekiel 34:15-16; Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4, 7)
 - ii. Those He finds he carries (Isaiah 46:3-4; 63:7-9; Matthew 11:28)
- f. He understands there is a growth process (Isaiah 42:3 [cp Matthew 12:20]; Mark 8:17-18; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-14)

How do Isaiah's questions encourage us to trust God? Let's read Isaiah 40:12-14.

- **Isaiah 40:12-14 HCSB** Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or marked off the heavens with the span of his hand? Who has gathered the dust of the earth in a measure or weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in scales? (13) Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or who gave Him His counsel? (14)

Who did He consult with? Who gave Him understanding and taught Him the paths of justice? Who taught Him knowledge and showed Him the way of understanding?

Note the contrast between oceans and space; dust and mountains – God is aware of the low and high, the small and the great.

The words “measured”, “marked”, “gathered”, “weighed” not only indicate the completeness of God’s understanding but also that HE measures us – not the other way around. He is OUR judge – not vice versa.

The prophet is using irony here, for the Spirit of the Lord IS Wisdom.¹ The Spirit is the source of all knowledge. Anything we know we got from the Spirit so we can rest assured that if anyone in the know; if anyone is in control; it is God.

By the way, none of the masculine pronouns “he” or “him” appear in the original text but have been supplied by the translators as clarifiers. However, if we read the text as it appears in the original it reads:

Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or who gave counsel? (14) Who took counsel? Who gave understanding and taught the paths of justice? Who taught knowledge and showed the way of understanding?

Read that way it is oddly reminiscent of the questions God directed to Job. “Tell me again, Who created everything? Since you’re so smart remind me – Who taught who?”

Isaiah provided great comfort for Israel as they were held captive by the superpower Babylon. Read Isaiah 40:15-17. What comfort is there for Israel as they are held captive by the superpower Babylon?

- **Isaiah 40:15-17 HCSB** Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are considered as a speck of dust on the scales; He lifts up the islands like fine dust. (16) Lebanon is not enough for fuel, or its animals enough for a burnt offering. (17) All the nations are as nothing before Him; they are considered by Him as nothingness and emptiness.

Contrary to modern practice, truly righteous people adopt this attitude of themselves. Abraham considered himself dust and ashes.²

Bildad the Shuhite, though an uncompassionate counselor, was yet an elder in the nation of Israel and he held that compared to God a human is no more than a worm!³

David also considered himself a worm in view of God’s glory.⁴

Apparently the Lord God agrees with this view for He said,

- **Isaiah 41:14 HCSB** Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel: I will help you-- the LORD's declaration. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

It may seem strange to post-modern ears but this was intended to give us comfort and hope! Again and again we are told by the Lord, “*I am with you. I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will hold on to you. I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand and say to you: Do not fear, I will help you. I WILL help you. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.*”⁵

It is by knowing who we are and who God is and by faith grasping the revelation that even though we are but dust and ashes, worms, quickly dying grass, and yet God loves us anyway⁶ that we can fully appreciate grace.

When we come to realize that God is high above all seeming gods, high above all nations, supreme over all principalities and powers then we realize that we need fear only Him. Godly

¹ Deuteronomy 34:9; 1 Corinthians 12:8; Ephesians 1:17

² Genesis 18:27

³ Job 25:5-6

⁴ Psalm 22:6

⁵ Isaiah 41:10-14

⁶ Psalm 103:13-18

fear drives out all other fears.⁷ However that same godly fear should compel us to holy and righteous living.

- [2 Corinthians 7:1 HCSB](#) Therefore dear friends, since we have such promises, we should wash ourselves clean from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, making our sanctification complete in the fear of God.

Knowing Who and what God is; knowing that He is sovereign over the nations, should give us tremendous comfort. As empires have risen and fallen, two things have remained constant throughout human history: God and His people. In spite of all the attempts to destroy us, to subvert us, to assimilate us, to seduce us and erase us...we remain. Why? Certainly not out of our own strength – for we are a small and weak people. I believe that God has chosen us precisely because in raising us, He gets all the glory!⁸

As economies boom and crash, as markets become either bearish or bullish, as our investments or our mortgages rise and fall, rise and fall, we can rest in the stable hope that our Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He has made us His heirs.⁹

As wars rage and revolts explode, as man's hatred for fellow-man is revealed in all its explicit and gory revulsion we can lay down at night with a centered calmness, our spirits floating like a leaf above the hurricane because nothing will touch us without our Father's consent, and anything that is allowed through His shield will be strictly controlled so that it only accomplishes His will – our good.¹⁰

In comparison to the Living God, the idols of the rich and poor fare pretty badly. Listen to:

- [Isaiah 40:18-24 HCSB](#) Who will you compare God with? What likeness will you compare Him to? (19) To an idol?--*something that* a smelter casts, and a metalworker plates with gold and makes silver welds *for it*? (20) To one who shapes a pedestal, choosing wood that does not rot? He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not fall over. (21) Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not considered the foundations of the earth? (22) God is enthroned above the circle of the earth; its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like thin cloth and spreads them out like a tent to live in. (23) He reduces princes to nothing and makes the judges of the earth to be irrational. (24) They are barely planted, barely sown, their stem hardly takes root in the ground when He blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind carries them away like stubble.

You could also consider reading Isaiah 44:9-19; 46:5-7; Jeremiah 10:1-16; Psalm 115:3-8 or 135:15-18 to see how the prophets compared Yahweh to the false gods of their day.

When confronted with the challenge that the Assyrian gods had made mincemeat of all the other country's gods, King Hezekiah conceded the Assyrian allegations that none of the other gods had offered protection but explained that it was because they were not actually God.¹¹ As clear proof the Angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib returned home with his tail between his legs and shortly thereafter was assassinated by his own sons.¹²

What kind of idols do we worship in our culture? We tend to worship pleasure, power, possessions, or people. Why? Why does worshiping idols often seem preferable to knowing the living God?

⁷ Romans 8:14-15

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Isaiah 31:1, 4-5

⁹ Psalm 50:10; Romans 8:16-18

¹⁰ Job 1:9-12; 2:4-6; Jeremiah 2:9-11; James 1:2-3

¹¹ Isaiah 37:18-19

¹² Isaiah 37:36-38

I believe that it is because it is easier to understand abstract concepts when you can look at a personified icon and say, ah ha! That is why the world behaves thusly. Such thinking has its pro's and con's, just like any other method. Idols provide a focus, a representation of a much larger concept. This opens up certain ways of thinking that might be closed otherwise, while at the same time closing paths that might have been left open

Can anybody think about something which has got no form? But can we truly realise the formless? To realise the formless one needs a form to look into it and make a relationship. Can we make a relationship with someone whom we cannot imagine or personify? If there is no personification and there will be no realisation.

For all those who pray the formless God, how can you think about the formless God and make a relationship? Are you thinking within your mind? The mind cannot think anything without a form.

Consider the following example of this problem.

- **Exodus 32:1-5 HCSB** When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt--we don't know what has happened to him!" (2) Then Aaron replied to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring *them* to me." (3) So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought *them* to Aaron. (4) He took *the gold* from their hands, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf. Then they said, "Israel, this is your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (5) When Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; then he made an announcement: "There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow."

Most commentators seem to think that the people of Israel were returning to the worship of one of the Egyptian gods in this incidence. I would like to beg to differ. Notice that they were not questioning the departure of God but of Moses. They were looking for some kind of visible figure head. If anything, Aaron should have been disappointed and angered in that no one seemed to consider him as a potential candidate. He was apparently considered less worthy than a metal lump!

Aaron seemed to be implying that the people would still be following Yahweh through the use of this external focal point when he said, "This is your God, who brought you up out of Egypt." Not only did he identify the deity as the one who had just rescued them but the word he used for God was "***Elohim***", the name always used for the one true God.

"Why is this distinction important?" you may ask. I think that it is important because it warns us of a much different and, to my mind, more dangerous and subtle form of idolatry. Most of us would instinctively shy from pagan idolatry. However, I am afraid that many "Christian" churches today get so focused on the external forms of their worship that they are no longer Ransomed.

We need to be aware of the danger of the cult of personality. No human should be the focal point of a church. No single spiritual gift should become so important that everyone's salvation is judged by whether they speak in tongues or not.

We need to be cautious that the FORM of worship does not take precedence over the One worshipped. Whether our congregation is highly liturgical or free-wheeling and post-modern is irrelevant. Are we still worshipping Christ and obeying His teachings? There is only one standard, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.¹³ Anything else is just so much cow dung.¹⁴

¹³ Ephesians 4:4-6

¹⁴ Philippians 3:8 – Paul considered it all just "skubalon" (Strong's #4657) i.e. dung or crap; for its use cp Isaiah 36:12; 1 Kings 14:10; 2 Kings 18:27

If we want form; if we want something visible; if we want something tangible to worship we should look to Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God.¹⁵

Some people view God as an uninvolved Creator who stands at a distance to watch his world. What does Isaiah 40:26 reveal about God's involvement?

- **Isaiah 40:26 HCSB** Look up and see: who created these? He brings out the starry host by number; He calls all of them by name. Because of His great power and strength, not one of them is missing.

When talk about Jesus being the image of the invisible God; talk about God's intimate involvement with His creation, what we are discussing is the doctrine of God's "immanence." "Immanence" literally means "to be within" or "near" in relation of creation. Immanence is balanced by the doctrine of "transcendence" and is closely related to God's omnipresence.

Transcendence means literally to "climb across". It is defined as "exceeding the usual limits." When we speak of the transcendence of God we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us. He is higher than the universe. He has absolute power over the universe. This universe has no power over Him. Transcendence describes God's consuming majesty; His exalted loftiness. He is an infinite cut above everything else as Hashem Himself stated.¹⁶

This view of God does not preclude His involvement for immediately before Isaiah 55's clear statement of God's transcending wisdom He states in verses 6 and 7 that He can be found; there are times when He is near; He is emotionally involved and is willing to forgive those who are repentant.

How is this possible? God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are Spirit.¹⁷ Unlike us, Adonai is not limited by time and space. He is not bound by a body. We are created in God's image, fashioned according to His plan, and we have some of His characteristics (intelligence, compassions, a spiritual essence) but God the Father does not have hands, feet, a body. He is not confined to the space/time continuum.

Yet God is also "immanent". He exists in, and extends to all parts of the created world. When we say that God is immanent we are affirming that though He transcends the universe in many ways, His omnipresence allows Him to be simultaneously very close to us. Though God is great and far superior and different from us, He is also personal. He condescends (willingly lowers Himself) to be close to us and known by us. If it helps, consider a large man getting down on one knee so that he can speak to a child face to face.¹⁸

The balanced view is thus that God is always present within the universe but He is distinct from it. God is within the universe but is not bound by the universe. In fact, the universe is bounded by God for "In Him we live and move and exist."¹⁹

¹⁵ Colossians 1:15

¹⁶ Isaiah 55:8-9

¹⁷ John 4:24

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 4:5-7

¹⁹ Acts 17:26-28; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Kings 20:23, 28; Psalm 113:4-9; 139:1-17; Ezekiel 20:32-37