

THE UNBEGOTTEN GOD

What does a disciple of Yeshua believe? Before being immersed, a person should be instructed in “knowledge about the unbegotten God.” More important than anything else, we believe in “the unbegotten God.” The word “unbegotten” means that nothing came before God. He was not created or brought into being. He is the “first cause.” He transcends the universe and is all-powerful and all-knowing. Knowing God is the most important thing in life. In this world, he is concealed from our view, but in the coming kingdom, everyone will know God.

First Cause

Think about this. Everything in the universe follows a sequence of cause-and-effect, all the way back to the beginning of time. Even time itself is part of the sequence of cause-and-effect. For example, you see a fallen leaf moving around on a sidewalk. What caused it to move like that? The wind caused it to move like that, but what caused the wind to blow? Air molecules slamming into one another created the movement of the wind, but what caused them to slam into one another? The sunlight unevenly heating the atmosphere created the turbulence that caused the air molecules to slam into one another, but what caused the sunlight to strike the atmosphere? Nuclear fusion and a continuous chain of hydrogen explosions cause the sun to shine, but what triggered those fusion reactions? You can follow the train of cause-and-effect all the way back to the first moment of the universe, but behind it all, there must be some initial uncaused cause that set everything in motion. The chain-of-cause and effect can’t just go on forever. It must have started with something. We call the uncaused cause of all things the “first cause.” Or to put it another way, “the unbegotten God.” Nothing caused God to happen. He’s the first cause.

Theists

The first of the ten commandments is the commandment to believe in God. The LORD says, “I am the LORD your God.” That doesn’t sound like a commandment. It’s more like a statement. But the sages pointed out that if you don’t believe in God, there’s no point to keeping any of his commandments. So the first commandment must be to believe in God.

Disciples of Yeshua are theists. The Greek word for “god” is *theos*. That’s why study of God is called “theology.” The belief in God is called “theism.” A “theist” believes that the first cause is a sentient (self-aware and thinking) spiritual entity that we call God. The theist believes that God exists. An atheist believes he does not exist. The atheist believes there is no first cause, or, if there is one, it’s not a sentient or all-powerful being. The agnostic believes that it’s impossible to know whether God exists or not.

- Theist: God exists
- Atheist: God doesn’t exist
- Agnostic: Impossible to know if God exists or not

To be a theist or an atheist takes a little bit of a leap of faith, but to be an agnostic takes no effort at all. It’s a reasonable and honest position, especially if you don’t know. But it’s also a lazy way

to dismiss life's greatest mystery; most people who call themselves agnostic haven't really thought about it.

Monotheists

Disciples of Yeshua are not just theists, we are monotheists.

The *S'hma* tells us, "God is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The ten commandments forbid worshipping any created thing, whether in heaven or on earth, as a god. That does not mean that there are no other spiritual beings or entities which might sometimes be mistaken as gods, it means that there is no other "first cause." God is the single point of origin, and because of that, no other being is on his level. Everything else is either created by him or derived, in some way, from his activity.

The belief in one God is called "monotheism." In today's world, monotheism is common, but it hasn't always been that way. In the days of the Bible, Jews were monotheists, but almost everyone else in the world was a polytheist. Polytheism is the belief in multiple gods. In the ancient world, polytheism seemed to make sense because people observed all sorts of different domains and opposing forces in the world. Light and dark, sun and moon, earth and sky, land and sea, summer and winter, rain and drought, life and death, etc. all seemed to imply different causes with differing effects. It seemed like the universe had all sorts of competing agendas. The most natural way to explain that was the theory of competing gods: a god of light and a god of dark, a sun god and a moon god, a god of the earth and a god of the sky, and so forth.

The belief in monotheism did not come through observation of the natural world, it came by revelation. The first chapter of Genesis offers a poetic narrative to explain how one God is the cause of all domains and effects in the universe. The same God who created day also created night. The same God who created the sun also created the moon. The story of the six days of creation is not a scientific textbook to explain physics, geology, or biology. It's a story to explain monotheism.

- Monotheism: Belief in one god
- Polytheism: Belief in many gods

Today, scientists have come to the same conclusions. We no longer see the world as a disconnected jumble of competing forces. Instead, scientists have learned to identify consistent laws of physics that govern all processes. From a scientific point of view, polytheism is no longer a viable worldview. Cosmologists look for a first cause, not first causes. Back in the days of the Bible, however, monotheism was not a foregone conclusion of science and philosophy as it is today. Early monotheists like Abraham and Moses were introducing a radical and disruptive idea when they taught that there is only one true God.

Transcendence

If God is the "first cause," that puts him in a different category than everything else in the universe. Everything else in the universe is caused. Everything else is a creation, but God is uncreated. That implies that he transcends the dimensions of the universe. What does the word

“transcend” mean? When we say that God is “transcendent,” it means that he exists apart from the universe and is not subject to the limitations of material existence.

Think of it this way. We are familiar with three dimensions: length, height, and width. But God is not a shape that can be measured. He is not any length, height, or width because length, height, and width are all created things and he is not a created thing. A created thing cannot be used to measure him. He is outside of the rules of length, height, and width.

The same applies to time and motion. Time and motion are about movement and sequence, but God does not move from point A to point B because he is outside of the universe where point A and point B exist. He is not caught up in the sequence of time like the rest of us; he exists outside of time. Some scientists say that there are many more dimensions, undetectable to us, that comprise the universe. If that’s the case, God exists outside of their unseen limitations as well. He is simply not part of the universe because he created the universe.

Transcendence means that God isn’t part of the created world. We shouldn’t think of God as living in heaven. Not if we think of heaven as someplace inside the universe. God is not contained in the universe. When King Solomon built a house for God, he said, “Will God really dwell with human beings here on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house which I have built for you” (2 Chronicles 6:16).

The Painter and the Painting

God transcends our version of reality. The transcendence of God explains one of life’s most perplexing riddles. If God exists, where is he? Why can’t we see him? Atheists and agnostics are quick to point out that no one can prove the existence of God. But that’s exactly what we would expect from a transcendent God. If God exists outside of the observable and quantifiable universe and is not a part of the universe, then we should not be able to observe him or prove his existence so long as we are inside the universe. (And we are always inside the universe.)

Here’s an easy analogy to help explain the concept. Imagine a painter who creates a painting of a farm. In the painting, he depicts a house, a barn, a farmyard, farm animals, a farmer, his wife, and their children. If you were the farmer inside the painting, would you be able to see the painter? Of course not. You would look around and see the house, the barn, the farmyard, your livestock, your wife, and your children, but you would not be able to see the painter. The painter isn’t in the picture. But that doesn’t mean the painter doesn’t exist. Just the opposite. The fact that you don’t see the painter or any other explanation for why you exist implies a transcendent first cause outside of the painting that created the you, your family, your farm, and everything you see in the painting.

Inside the painting, it’s reasonable to be an agnostic. The characters in the painting don’t see the painter, and in fact, they might not even suspect that the artist exists at all. They might be so preoccupied with the things inside the painting that anything outside the painting never occurs to them. The farmer looks around and sees only the world of cause-and-effect inside the painting. He has no knowledge of the painter, and if he isn’t the contemplative sort, it might not even cross his mind to wonder who painted everything in the first place. Therefore, it’s reasonable to be an

agnostic, but it would be unreasonable for the farmer in the painting to be an atheist. The atheist says, “I don’t see God, therefore I don’t believe in him.” (Do atheists really believe only in things they can see?) But if you could see God, that would mean that he was part of the observable universe and not the first cause of the universe. It’s because God is transcendent that we don’t expect to be able to see him or to know anything about him at all.

The Divine Word

But wait a moment. If God is completely transcendent, outside the material universe of cause-and-effect, and not measurable or quantifiable within the limits of our world, then how would we know about him at all? And how does he talk with people in the Bible or appear at Mount Sinai? How can we hear his voice or experience his presence?

Let’s go back to the painting of the farmyard. Suppose the painter wanted the farmer to realize that there is a painter. Suppose he wanted to reveal his identity to the farmer and actually let the farmer get to know him a little bit. It’s not possible to bring the farmer outside of the painting to meet him. Instead, the painter would have to find a way to put himself inside the painting. Here’s what he could do: paint a version of himself onto the canvas. If he painted a little picture of himself into the painting, then the characters in the painting would perceive him. He would be entering their world. It wouldn’t really be him in his complete total being, it would be a representation of himself that could be seen and comprehended within the painting.

That’s what God did. When God created the universe, he wanted to interact with it and with his creations, so he created a finite version of himself that can be seen and experienced within the limitations of the universe. This finite version of himself is called “The Word.” In Hebrew, it’s called the *Dibberah*; in Aramaic its called the *Memra*, and in Greek its called the *Logos*. All three mean “Word.”

The Word is God as he can be perceived, understood, and experienced within the universe. It’s not the fullness of the infinite and transcendent God, but it is a revelation of that being. You can compare the Word to light that shines out from a luminary. The light is not the luminary, but neither is it disconnected from the luminary. It’s an extension and expression of the source.

The Word is the finite expression of the infinite God. The Word can intersect with the finite created universe in order to reveal the existence of the infinite God who dwells outside the universe. You could even think of the Word as the end of the painter’s paintbrush that touches the canvas. It’s an expression of the painter on a level that the creatures within the painting can comprehend. That’s why the Gospel of John says that everything in the universe was created through the Word:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through it, and apart from it nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1-3)

The Greatness of God

God's transcendence also explains three otherwise impossible things to understand about God: his omniscience, his omnipresence, and his omnipotence. Let's define all three.

God is omniscient. That means that God knows everything. He knows every detail in the universe from its beginning to its end. He knows every deed we commit and every thought we think. He knows the name of every person who ever lived or ever will live. How does he know all that? Because he is outside of it all. Like the painter outside the painting, he can look at the whole work of art in a single glance and recognize every brush stroke.

God is omnipresent. That means that God is everywhere. Even though he transcends the universe and his presence is concealed from the universe, there is no part of the universe concealed from him. Wouldn't it be ridiculous to image the painter being limited to one spot on the canvas, such as inside the barn? The painter isn't in the picture, so the whole canvas is always before him. There is no place where God does not exist, (but certainly there are places where God's presence is concealed).

God is omnipotent. That means that God is all powerful. If God created everything, he also has the power to alter it, modify it, destroy it, or recreate it according to his will. If the painter decides he wants to change the picture, add something to it, remove something, or clear the canvas and start all over, he has the power to do it.

Omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence are impossible inside the universe. They don't make any sense according to the laws that govern reality. But since God transcends the universe and its laws, and since he is the first cause that set the universe and its laws into motion, the limitations of the universe don't apply to him. That's the greatness of God.

Revelation

The Talmud says that "If you have seen the greatness of God, you have actually seen only his humility." That means that, if God has revealed anything about himself to us at all, he had to reduce that experience and condense that information to a level where we can understand it. If God didn't paint himself into the picture, we couldn't know anything about him.

When God reveals something about himself within his created universe, we call that a "revelation." The word "revelation" implies the uncovering of things that have been otherwise hidden or concealed. Since God is not part of the universe, he is "concealed" from us, so to speak. That's why we call this universe "the world of concealment." From within the world of concealment it looks like God doesn't exist.

It's like the problem with dark matter. Dark matter is the invisible and undetectable substance that scientists say comprises most of the matter and energy in the universe. The problem with dark matter is that we have not discovered it yet. Since it's invisible and undetectable, we don't have any way of discovering it, but scientists can mathematically prove that it must exist for the universe to function. Otherwise the math doesn't work. Just because we can't detect it doesn't mean it isn't there. It's just concealed from our ability to perceive it.

That's sort of the way it is with God. Because he is the first cause and transcends the universe, he is concealed from us. We may infer his existence, but it's impossible to do much more than that unless he reveals something about himself to us. Unless he paints himself into the picture, how can we know anything about him?

All God's revelation to us comes through the agency of his Word. The Word is called "the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every person" (John 1:9). It was the Word of God who spoke the universe into being when God said, "Let there be." His spoken Word became the agent through which all things were made. It was also the Word of God who spoke with Adam, told Noah to build an ark, called Abraham, appeared to the forefathers, appeared to Moses in a burning bush, led Israel out of Egypt, spoke ten commandments from Mount Sinai, dwelt in the Tabernacle, led Israel through the wilderness, and so forth. All of God's interactions with the created world take place through his Word.

The Big Assumption

Disciples of Yeshua are theists, but not just any kind of theists. Not all theists believe in the God of the Bible. The philosopher Spinoza and the scientist Einstein both believed in the existence of God, but they did not believe in the God of the Bible. The god they believed in was not at all interested in this world or involved in it. He was like a painter who chose not to paint himself into the picture but, after completing the painting, he set the picture aside and went on to paint other pictures. He has no further interaction with the picture once it is painted. The god they believed in is like a watchmaker who makes the watch, winds it up and starts it ticking, and then goes on to make the next watch. After starting the chain of cause-and-effect, he no longer involves himself. That's the kind of god many people believe in, but he's not the kind of god you could ever personally know or interact with.

People who believe in the God of the Bible make one big assumption. We assume that God is a personal and sentient being who desires to communicate with his creatures. We assume that God wants to be involved with his creation and with his creatures and continues to do so. That's a big leap of faith, but once we have made that leap, it makes it simple to find the truth. If we believe that God wants to be involved, we only need to look for evidence of his revelation. Look at the record of history. Has there ever been a god in the historical record who revealed himself within the universe? If so, is there any consistent record of such revelation that spans across history? There is. It's the God of the Bible who reveals himself through people of Israel, through Jewish history, and through the inspired writings of the Jewish people: the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament. Outside of Judaism, no other religion can claim a consistent historical and on-going revelation of a deity who claims to transcend the universe as the only god and the first cause and who reveals himself to human beings. Assuming that God wants to talk to us and reveal himself to us, we know where to look: the Bible.

God as King

Disciples of Yeshua seek first God's kingdom. We make it our top priority.

When we realize that God is the first cause, the only God, and that he wants to reveal himself to his creatures and foster a relationship with them, that raises an important practical implication. It means that there is no meaning to life other than to know God, to seek after his revelation, and to enter a relationship with him. All other goals and ambitions are trivial in comparison. If God exists, there can be nothing more important than him. If everything comes from God, that puts God in first place. That's why disciples of Yeshua seek first God's kingdom.

Disciples of Yeshua believe that, in the future, there will be a time when God is revealed in a powerful way to the whole world. It's as if everyone and everything in the whole painting will suddenly realize that there is a painter. In that day, the prophets say that everyone will know the

LORD and “the knowledge of the LORD will fill the world like the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). We call that future era the Kingdom of Heaven because then everyone will know that God is the only true king of the whole universe. In the kingdom, there will be no atheists or agnostics or polytheists. In the kingdom, everyone will worship the LORD and confess his name. In that day, the LORD will reveal himself to be king over everything and everyone. Everyone will realize that he is the one-and-only God and that there is no other thing but him that matters:

The LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be revealed as one, and His name will be revealed as one. (Zechariah 14:9)