

Immutability is another characteristic of God's being that has been an important component of the Christian doctrine of God through the centuries. **Immutability refers to the absence of change in God. The Bible straightforwardly declares that God does not change (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17).** Unfortunately, however, traditional theology identified immutability with impassibility. Such an identification was required by the timeless understanding of eternity (see III. A). When immutability is understood as impassibility, God is said to possess a static life in which relations, emotions, new experiences, and changes in His inner life are totally excluded, lest the perfection of God should be tainted. In other words, immutability would describe the life of God as unrelated to human experiences and history. Such a conception has hardly any place for either a historical understanding of the great controversy between God and Satan (see Great Controversy II-V), or a real historical incarnation of Jesus Christ (see Christ I. A. 2). In so teaching, classical theology has followed Greek philosophy in total forgetfulness of the biblical concept of immutability.

On the other hand, while the Bible has no word to express "immutability," it clearly affirms that in God "there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). The biblical understanding of God's eternity (see III. A) allows for an undergirding compatibility between God's perfection and a conception of His life that includes dynamic changes such as real newness (Isa. 43:19; Jer. 31:31; Rev. 21:5), emotions (Ex. 34:14; Num. 11:33; Deut. 4:24; 6:15), relations (Lev. 26:12; Zech. 13:9; Rev. 21:3), and even God's repentance (Ex. 32:14; Jer. 18:8; 42:10). It seems clear that the immutability of the biblical God, who is capable of changing His decision to destroy Nineveh (Jonah 3:4) on account of the Ninevites' positive response to Jonah's preaching (verse 10), cannot be understood as impassibility. However, God's change of mind, as His repenting, does not involve a change in His divine purpose for human beings, but rather an adjustment to human change of mind and purpose. In addition, the Bible conceives divine change in relation to God's dynamic life, not in relation to the constitution of His being. In other words, the reality of God does not vary, nor does He change from a less perfect into a more perfect being. God is always the same (Ps. 102:26, 27; Heb. 13:8).

According to the biblical doctrine of God, movement and change in the divine life, which according to classical theology are impossible, play a central role in the perfect nature of divine life and activity. Moreover, the Incarnation assumes that God has the capability not only of relating and living within the limits of created time but also of personally experiencing new, real historical events. The Incarnation involves a real historical movement within God's own divine life without requiring change or development in the structure of the divine being (Phil. 2:6-8). Within this context God's immutability is consistently shown through the Bible as His "faithfulness," or constancy, in His historical acts. God is able to do things in history and to change His mind (Jer. 18:8; 42:10; Jonah 3:9, 10) without infringing upon the perfection of His being or going through a process of inner development from a lower to a higher level of being. At the same time, His eternal faithfulness (Ps. 100:5; 117:2) warrants that He will never change His mind but rather will always fulfill His plans (Isa. 25:1), oaths (Heb. 7:21), and promises of reward (Isa. 61:8), protection (Ps. 91:14), or, punishment (Ps. 119:75) in relation to human choices. Historical faithfulness is, therefore, a divine characteristic that distinguishes God from humans (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29). The immutability of God—understood not as an impassibility but as the eternal identity of God's being with itself and the historical faithfulness, constancy, and consistency of His relation, purposes, and actions toward us—is the necessary presupposition for theological ideas such as typology, incarnation, cross, and great controversy between God and Satan as presented throughout the Bible.

also includes the destruction of the originator of sin (Mal. 4:1; Rev. 20:10), is necessary for the creation of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), and the final eradication of evil from the universe (Nahum 1:9).

Through history and prophecy Scripture presents detailed reflection on the manifold ways in which God has been, continues to be, and will yet be involved in the providential salvific work, personally guiding every receptive human being to the achievement of present and future salvation in Jesus Christ.

V. Oneness of God

There is no specific place where the Bible discusses the whole doctrine of God. The biblical doctrine of God is developed in following the historical account of God’s personal interventions and revelations in the sacred text. The doctrine of the Trinity, at the very center of the doctrine of God in particular and of Christian theology in general, is no exception. When God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, however, a knowledge of the trinitarian nature of God became necessary for the Christian church. The incarnation of Jesus Christ involved more than the dwelling of God with humanity; it brought with it knowledge about the Father and the Holy Spirit as a necessary context for a proper understanding of Jesus Christ’s incarnation, cross, resurrection, and heavenly ministry. That the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead became known through the Incarnation does not mean that it had not existed before or was not directly involved in the work of salvation. **Since God is eternal and immutable, His trinitarian nature has never changed or come into being.** We shall now turn our attention to the biblical teaching about the Trinity. Theological theories and doctrines about the Trinity generated by the fateful combination of biblical data and philosophical ideas will be considered in the historical section. Before the specific data revealed with the Incarnation are examined, it is necessary to consider the biblical concept of the oneness of God and OT hints regarding plurality in the divine being (see VI).

A. Evidence From the OT

The “oneness” of God refers to the singleness of His being. In other words, the “oneness” of God refers to the fact that according to the Bible there is only one God, as opposed to more than one. The classical OT statement about the oneness of God, which is also followed by some in the NT, pronounces God to be one: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). Moses, however, had already explained that “the Lord is God” and that “there is no other” (Deut. 4:39). As David heard God’s covenant promise renewed to Him, he praised God and recognized that “there is no God besides thee” (2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Chron. 17:20). Through the prophet Isaiah, Yahweh Himself called Israel to recognize that “I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me” (Isa. 43:10; cf. 42:8). From these texts it clearly follows that according to the OT there is only one absolute God for Israel as well as for the whole Creation. These statements say nothing, however, about the inner nature of the one absolute God.

B. Evidence From the NT

In spite of the fact that God revealed the inner complexity of His being in a surprising way through Jesus Christ, the basic understanding of the oneness of God, already expressed in Old Testament times, is maintained throughout the NT. Jesus Himself, when asked which commandment was the first answered by referring to Deut. 6:4: “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one’ ” (Mark 12:29). Discussing the function of the law in his letter to the Galatians, Paul categorically stated that “God is one” (Gal. 3:20). Finally, James also stated that “God is one” (James 2:19). The OT idea of God’s oneness remains unchanged in the NT. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of Christianity. He is the only God. There is no other. At times “oneness” can involve the meaning of unity (i.e., John 10:30; 17:21, 23). However, if the

“oneness” expressed in these texts is conceived only as a gathering of independent “onenesses” that come together in order to form a unity, the specific singleness characteristic of the one Godhead to which they testify is dissolved into a plurality of gods. The oneness of God plays a decisive, systematic role in determining the referent for the biblical revelations about God. In other words, since the God of the Bible is one and not many, all the various revelations about Him presented throughout the Bible refer to the same, one divine reality and not to a plurality of divine beings.

VI. The God head in the OT

In the Bible the radical affirmation of God’s oneness does not settle the content of His nature. By associating the oneness of God with the timeless interpretation of His eternity, classical theology concluded that God’s nature must be simple; that is, one cannot think of God as having parts or components. Simplicity would rule out any form of plurality or composition. On the basis of its strong affirmations of the oneness of God, however, biblical thinking conceives His nature not in terms of simplicity but rather in terms of complex plurality. The personal complexity of the one divine being that is clearly articulated in the NT is already expressed by the OT in a less specific way. Let us consider some of the OT hints regarding the personal plurality of the one Godhead that receive further and definitive expression in the NT.

A. The Plural of Fullness and the Godhead

In the Creation account God refers to Himself in the plural form. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ ” (Gen. 1:26). Other instances occur elsewhere in Genesis: “Behold, the man has become like one of us” (Gen. 3:22); “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language” (Gen. 11:7). Finally, “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1) in the heavenly temple (verses 1–4), revealed Himself to Isaiah and disclosed His mission by asking, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (verse 8). Though other interpretations have been suggested, when these references to God’s actions in the plural are understood as “plural of fullness,” it is possible to see that “a distinction in the divine Being with regard to a plurality of persons is here represented as a germinal idea” (Hasel 65). Of itself, then, the usage of the plural form in relation to God points to a concept of the divinity in which the simplicity adopted by classical theology is replaced by a concept of the one Godhead that involves plurality and complexity.

B. The Angel of Yahweh

A most interesting line of evidence that moves toward clarifying the OT concept of plurality in relation to God’s essence is found in several passages that deal with the Angel of the Lord. The concept of *mal’ak YHWH* integrates the mission-oriented role of angels with God’s capability to reveal Himself in a personal, direct, visible, way by adopting a created form. For instance, He took on the form of a man when He revealed Himself to Abraham (Gen. 18:1–5) and Jacob (Gen. 32:24–30). Throughout the Bible angels are created beings, not to be worshiped (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10). Angelic beings have the specific task of carrying out God’s specific purposes relating to human history (Heb. 1:14).

The designation “angel of the Lord” or “Angel of God” is frequently used in relation to angelic beings (cf. 2 Sam. 14:17; 24:16; 1 Kings 19:7; 2 Kings 1:3, 15; 1 Chron. 21:12, 15, 16). On some specific occasions, however, the Angel of the Lord is identified with Yahweh. In Judges 2:1–5 the Angel of the Lord appears as the One who brought Israel out of Egypt and entered into covenant with their fathers, while other texts identify Yahweh as the agent of these very events (Ex. 6:6; 13:3; Deut. 5:12; 7:19; Joshua 2:10; 1 Kings 8:9). In the burning bush God appeared personally to Moses. In this momentous theophany (Ex. 3:2–15) the Angel of the Lord