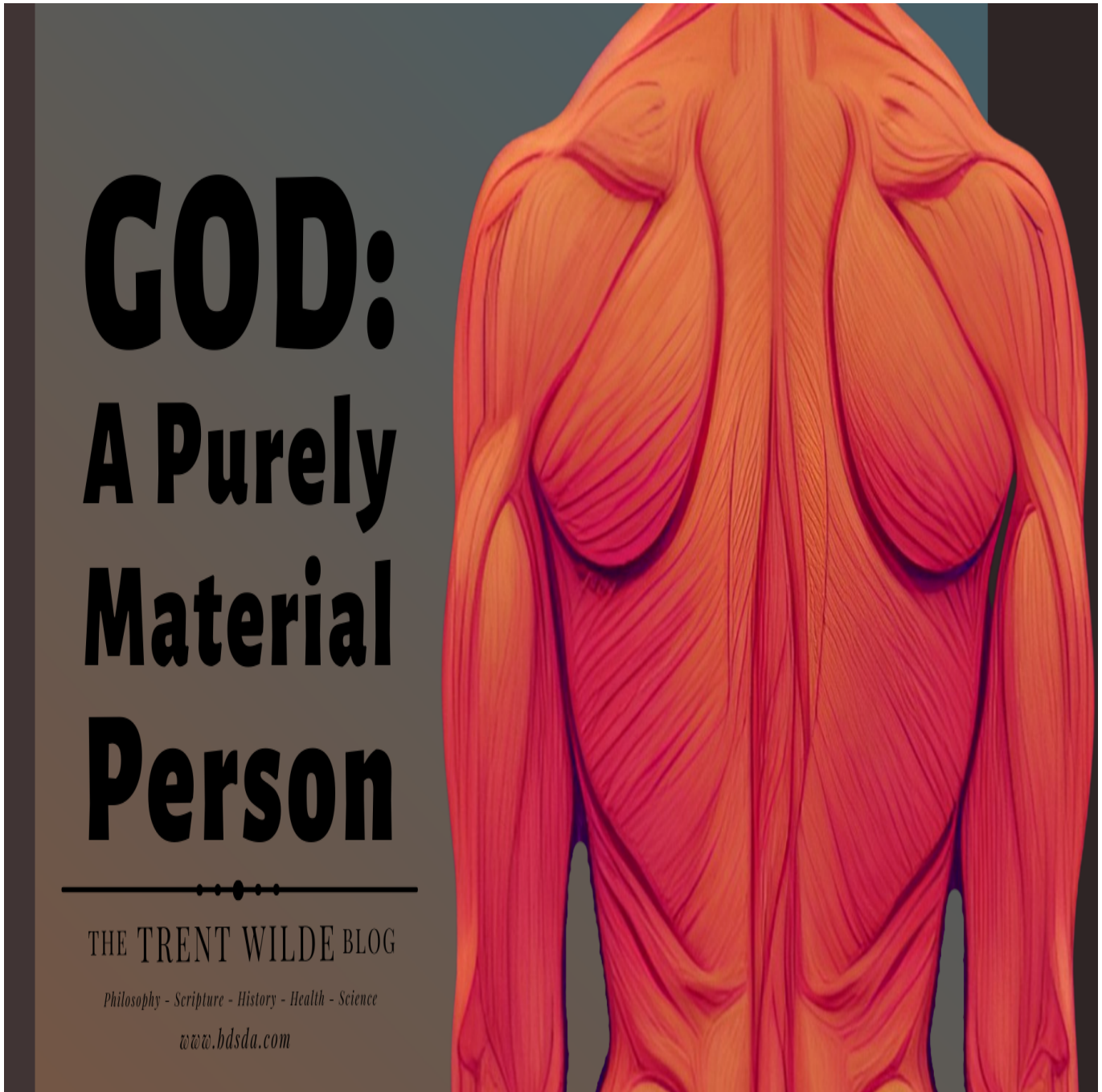


God: A Purely Material Person

Description



¹The image of the back included in this banner is an edited version of an image I generated using WOMBO's Dream ai services. ([Podcast Version](#) – [Follow/Subscribe](#))

So, it's the Day of Atonement, and we've covered a lot in seven blog posts/podcasts over the past

10 days starting with [Dirt You Are \(Israelite Anthropology\)](#). Fittingly, today we'll be talking about the subject that is holiest of all, the person of God Himself.

In [our last post](#), we covered the material personhood of Jesus – that he is an exclusively physical being with no non-physical component. This is how he is presented throughout the New Testament in his life, his death, his resurrection as well as his ascension and expected second coming. There are certain implications of this for how one understands heaven and even God himself. *That* will be the focus of this post. To start, let's read a few examples of the many statements in the New Testament that say that when Jesus ascended, he sat at the right hand of God.

First, let's read Acts 7:55-56 which tells of Stephen's experience just before being stoned.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 and said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

– Acts 7:55-56 (WEB) ²WEB stands for *World English Bible*.

Next, 1 Peter 3:21-22,

21 ...Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him.

– 1 Peter 3:21-22 (WEB)

And then Hebrews 1:

3 His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

– Hebrews 1:3 (WEB)

These texts present us with an idea that by now in the series should seem like the obvious and unavoidable conclusion of Jesus' bodily ascension and still future bodily return. That is, since Jesus is a purely material person, the place where he went must be material – it must be physical. And according to these texts, he went into heaven and sat at the right hand of God.

This brings us to an important point: Ancient Israelites didn't think of "heaven" the way many do today. They didn't think it was a realm beyond the physical universe. They thought it was a part of the physical universe just as much as earth is. The Hebrew word often translated "heaven" is really better translated "skies." Throughout Hebrew literature, it's spoken of as the place where the sun, moon, and stars are, for example. Ancient Israelites, like other ancient peoples, didn't know the earth was a planet. They imagined the earth to be a relatively flat region with a solid dome above it. That dome they understood to be the sky. On the other side of the dome was water, which is why the sky is blue. But actually, they believed there were multiple skies, or multiple domes, the larger ones covering the smaller ones. And they understood each sky to contain enormous regions just as material as our own region, earth. There are ancient Jewish texts, like *The Testament of Levi*, for example, that describe this explicitly. And when you understand this, it makes plain what Paul meant when he spoke of being taken up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians

12:2), and what Isaiah meant when he referred to the king of Babylon wanting to ascend above the skies and reside in a mountain of assembly (Isaiah 14:13), and what the author of Hebrews meant when speaking of Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the *heavenly* Jerusalem where there are innumerable angels (Hebrews 12:22).

Clearly, they didn't understand modern cosmology, but they *did* understand that up there in the sky are places like down here. There are mountains and rivers and cities and trees, etc., etc. In other words, they had a purely materialistic notion of the regions beyond earth. This naturally included God's own abode and God himself. The material Jesus sitting at the right hand of God obviously entails God himself being a material person. And notice, Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is the very image of God's substance. Translations differ in saying "substance" or "person," but the point is the same – Jesus's physical form is like God's physical form. And, as we covered last time, Jesus (even after his resurrection) was still a man, making it clear that God's body has the shape that we most commonly think of as "human shape," but which ancient Israelites didn't think was unique to humans (see for example Genesis 1:26-27). This is how God is described throughout ancient Hebrew literature and in the writings of the earliest Christ-followers. Nowhere do they indicate that God is a bodiless mind or an immaterial entity of any kind. On the contrary, they consistently portray him as a purely material person.

There are many passages that could be cited on this point, but here I'll quote just two:

First, Daniel 7:9, which describes God in his heavenly courtroom:

And I was watching until that thrones were set up
and an Ancient of Days sat,
and his clothing was white as snow
and the hair of his head as pure wool
And his throne was flames of fire
and its wheels, burning fire.

– Daniel 7:9 (NABT)³NABT stands for *Not A Bible Translation* – my own translation.

Quite plain; the deity is a real material person with a head, hair, clothing, etc. People often spiritualize these plain descriptions away by saying that God is just described like this to become more relatable to us. But this explanation is entirely an imposition on to the text; nothing in the text itself substantiates it at all. And if we allow ourselves to interpret passages like that, what couldn't we explain away?

The next passage is a little harder to explain away. It's Exodus 33:18, 20-23. Moses is speaking to Yahweh:

And he said, "Please show me your substance."

...

And he said, "You are not able to see my face, for the human will not see me and live." And Yahweh said, "Here *is* a place with me, and you will station yourself on the rock, and it will be, when my substance passes, I will put you in the crevice of the rock, and I will block with my palm over you until I pass. Then I will remove my palm, and you will see my back, but my face will not be seen."

– Exodus 33:18-23 (NABT)

This text is explicit that God is a material body. The most obvious point is that it refers to his body in plain terms, mentioning specific body parts. But there is another factor that indicates that this text is describing God as inherently material – inherently corporeal, bodily. This is what I'm referring to: Moses is presented as having the understanding that God has a body, and he asks to see it. God agrees to show Moses his body, just not his face. In light of this, to suggest that God isn't truly a material being, but that he merely took on a body for this occasion, would amount to charging God with deception. And I highly doubt that anyone would think the author was trying to say that God was duping Moses! It is clear indeed that this interaction between Moses and Yahweh is presented as a genuine revelation of God's own body.

As I've already said, there's a whole lot more to this subject. If you want more right away, you can check out [our Personality of God tag](#). But we also have an upcoming series of Zoom meetings from October 11-17 (2022) all about this subject and its implications. I hope you come!

UPDATE: The above-mentioned meetings are now complete. You can learn all about them and watch the recordings [HERE](#).

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