

Plain Talk About Who God Is

Trying to read the Bible without understanding who the God of the Bible is is likely to be frustrating. Unfortunately so much pressure and dogmatism now surrounds the issue of who God is that Christians are unable to approach the text of Scripture with an open mind. A great measure of fear attends their studies, because they have been told what kind of a God they are to find in the Bible, or else...hellfire! This is a hopeless atmosphere for calm and reasoned investigation.

The matter of deciding who God is in the Bible is relatively simple, if we follow sound procedure.

And sound procedure demands that we start our investigation in the right place, the Hebrew Bible, the Bible which nurtured the Jews and Jesus and which Jesus categorically said he did not come to destroy (Matt. 5:17).

What God is presented in Jesus' Bible?

The creed of Israel, the cardinal tenet of all sound religion and the great hedge against idolatry and paganism, is of course the *Shema* — the "Hear O Israel" (Deut 6:4). This creed declares that the "Lord God is ONE LORD." The oneness of God is here proposed in the simplest and clearest language.

To confirm this central truth the Hebrew Bible describes God with singular pronouns (I, Me, You, Him, My, Your, His) *thousands upon thousands of times!*

Anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of language knows, or ought to know, that singular pronouns denote a single Person. God therefore in the Bible is *One* Person.

Jesus affirmed the unitary, non-trinitarian faith of Israel when he replied to the question put to him by a theologian as to the greatest of all the commandments.

Jesus replied that the "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord" is the pinnacle of divine revelation. Only *that* God is to be loved with all our hearts and minds and strength (Mark 12:28ff.).

Paul echoed the teaching of Jesus on this point, with complete simplicity and clarity. Discussing the multiple Gods of paganism, Paul contrasted the Christian belief:

"To us [Christians] there is ONE God, the Father.... And no one besides Him" (I Cor 8:4-6). That of course is unitary monotheism, belief that God is a single Person.

The One God is defined, we note, not as three eternal Persons, but as the Father.

At once we are aware of a great difference between what traditionally appears in faith statements and what Paul actually said: "There is one God, the Father." That is simply the unitary monotheism of Paul's and Jesus' Jewish heritage. It is by definition also the Christian creed, because it is the biblical creed.

The stark simplicity of this creed may seem threatening to some, but it is the force of prejudice which makes it difficult to accept. There is no complexity about Paul's creed. It is straightforward and beyond argument.

Many, however, find it unsatisfactory, and they rush to point out that Paul in I Corinthians 8:4-6 went on to say that Jesus was also "God."

But did he? In fact, not at all. Paul did indeed go on to say that "there is one Lord Jesus Messiah." But it would be a fatal and confusing move to think that Paul, by calling Jesus *Lord*, was really calling him God! There is a crucial difference.

You see, there is a simple and overpoweringly influential text behind Paul's language. It is Psalm 110:1, the very text which Jesus himself had produced when describing the relationship of himself the Messiah to the one God (Mark 12:35-37).

Psalm 110:1 is quoted or alluded to no less than 23 times in the New Testament. It appears in every section of the New Testament, and it would be a major mistake to ignore its importance.

Psalm 110:1 recognizes in good Jewish fashion that God (Yahweh) is *One* Individual and that One God speaks in a prophetic oracle to another individual, not Himself, who is "my lord," the lord of David. "My lord" is told to sit at Yahweh's right hand until he is given future victory over his enemies.

Now the second lord of Psalm 110:1 is definitely NOT God, but a superior *human* being. How do we know this for certain? Because of the careful choice of words in the original. "My lord" in the Hebrew inspired text is ADONI. In every one of the 195 times the word ADONI appears in the Bible, it *never* means God, but always a human (occasionally angelic) superior. ADONI is the word which tells us 195 times that the one named is not God, but man.

So when Paul said that next to the One God, the Father, there is "one Lord Jesus Messiah," he meant the one (superior, human) lord as defined by Psalm 110:1. Paul has not confused Jesus with God.

Psalm 110:1 could well have used another word to describe the Messiah. There was a word ADONAI which meant God (in all of its 449 occurrences). But the spirit never confused God and the Son of God. God was Yahweh or Adonai and the Messiah was the human lord, ADONI.

There are two lords in the Bible, God and Jesus. But only the Father is the One God ("There is One God, the Father"). Jesus is the Lord Messiah, not the Lord God (Luke 2:11, etc.).

The creed of the Bible is the essence of simplicity: "There is One God, the Father, and one Lord Messiah, Jesus" (I Cor. 8:4-6).