

Jesus: Eternal and Divine

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Introduction

It was prophesied again and again in the OT that a Messiah would come. The Bible shows (and Christians believe) that the Messiah was Jesus, whose earthly parents were Joseph and Mary of Nazareth. Jesus lived a sinless life and then gave His life on the cross in order to redeem mankind from their sins. Perhaps it is stated best in John 1:11-12. “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

Christians agree that Jesus is referred to in Scripture as the Son of God. But there is disagreement among some regarding the true nature of Jesus and His relationship with God the Father. Some believe in the trinity and sometimes use terms like God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit in an attempt to express the divinity of all three Persons.

Others believe there is only one supreme being who expressed Himself in three different ways; they commonly say that “Jesus is God” and are often referred to as “Oneness” believers or modalists (the belief that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are merely “modes” of God). Still others believe that God is the only divine being and that Christ is merely a created being.

Names of God

To better understand the nature of Jesus, it is helpful to first consider what the Bible says about God. Several names are given in Scripture for God. In the OT, the Hebrew word *Elohim* (Strong #430) is found 2606 times and is translated as “God.” Its form is plural (seemingly indicating a plurality of majesty and divinity), though its construction is singular. The singular form *Eloah* (Strong #433), found only 57 times, is used generally as an expression in poetry and is found most often in the book of Job. Corresponding to that is *Elah* (Strong #246), which is found 95 times in the Aramaic passages of the OT.

The word *El* (Strong #410) is found 245 times and was a common designation for deity in general, whether the one true God or other gods. Thus it is often combined with other terms to identify God (*El Shadday*, etc.). Also found numerous times is the Hebrew word *Adhon* (Strong #113, 334 times) or *Adhonay* (Strong #136, 439 times), which means “lord” or “master.”

The most commonly used and distinctive word used in reference to God the Father is the tetragrammaton *YHWH* (Strong #3068, found 6828 times), which is transliterated into English as Jehovah or Yahweh. This is the name by which God was to be known to the generations of Israel, as given to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15: “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” And God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD (*YHWH*), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.””

“I AM” is derived from the verb “to be” (*hayah*, from which is derived *YHWH*), and thus refers to the eternal nature and self-existence of God. The Jews would not pronounce this name, however, but instead would say *Adhonay* (Lord). Accordingly, it is generally translated in Scripture as Lord (in many translations rendered LORD or LORD; a few use the transliteration Jehovah).

The Hebrew *Elohim* (and at times *YHWH*) is typically translated as *theos* (Strong #2316) in the Greek Septuagint (an example of such can be found in Matthew 22:32 where Exodus 3:6 is quoted). The Hebrew *Adhonay* and *YHWH* (Jehovah or Yahweh) are typically translated into Greek as *kurios* (Strong #2962). In the Greek NT, *theos* is usually translated into English as “God”; *kurios* is usually translated as “Lord.” Thus the following generally applies: *Elohim* = *Theos* = God; *Adhonay* and *YHWH* (Jehovah or Yahweh) = *Kurios* = Lord.

Jesus is Called God

Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" The Jews developed the practice of reciting these words twice a day (called the *Shema*). Indeed in the midst of a world full of man-made gods, Jehovah God stands as the one true God. In Exodus 20:2-6, He commanded Israel to have no other gods before Him. When asked to name the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, affirming His conviction that God is the one Lord (Mark 12:29-32). He did so once again in John 17:3 when He prayed to "the one true God."

And yet the Bible also refers to Jesus as God:

- John 1:1 "the Word (*logos*—context shows this to refer to Jesus) was God (*theos*)"
- John 20:28 Thomas called Jesus "my Lord (*kurios*) and my God (*theos*)"
- Hebrews 1:8 (quotation of Psalm 45:6-7) Jesus the Son is called "God (*theos*)"
- Titus 2:13 "our great God (*theos*) and Savior, Christ Jesus"
- 2 Peter 1:1 "our God (*theos*) and Savior, Jesus Christ"
- 1 John 5:20 "...the Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God (*theos*) and eternal life."

Notice that Jesus is referred to several times as *theos*. Again, as already shown, this is generally the same as the Hebrew word *elohim*, the plural word for God and divine majesty. In Genesis 1:26, the Bible says: "Then God (*elohim*) said, "Let US make man in OUR image, according to OUR likeness" (see also Genesis 11:7). This plural form may be intended then by the use of *theos* in referring to Jesus, the Son of God.

Regardless, these verses show that both the Father (Jehovah or Yahweh to Israel) and the Son are to be considered to have the nature of divinity, the nature of God (*elohim*). There is indeed only one true God, but apparently (in a way that is difficult to understand as humans), He consists of both the Father and the Son. Indeed the Lord (*YHWH*) is God (*Elohim*), and so also is His Son Jesus Christ.

Other Passages on the Divinity of Jesus

In Matthew 1:23, Christ is called "Immanuel" which means "God with us." Isaiah 9:6 says, "For a child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest upon His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

In Philippians 2:6-8, Paul refers to Jesus' equality with God. He states that Jesus "existed in the form of God," but that He did not feel the need to grasp or hold on to that equal nature/form. Instead, for our behalf, He "emptied Himself (literally, laid aside His privileges, as footnoted in the NASB), taking the form of a bond-servant, ... He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Colossians 2:9 speaks of Jesus and says, "For in Him (Christ) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

Related to this is the teaching that Jesus is the very image or expression of God. John 1:1 refers to Jesus as the Word. In the Greek, Word is from *logos*, which means "thought" or "expression." In Colossians 1:15, it says that Christ is "the image of the invisible God." 2 Corinthians 4:4 also says that Christ "is the image of God." Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ "is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation (express image—KJV) of His nature."

John 5:1-16 speaks of Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath. V18 says, "For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

Later, recorded in John 10:30-33, the Jews intended to stone Jesus for saying, "I and the Father are one." V33 says, "The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a Man, make Yourself out to be God.""

Christ also showed His divine nature and equality with God by forgiving sins. In Mark 2:5-7, Jesus forgave a man's sins. The scribes reasoned that Christ was blaspheming because, as they said, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Indeed such is consistent with OT teaching (Job 14:4; Isaiah 43:25; Daniel 9:9) as well as what Jesus Himself indicated in Matthew 6:12 about asking God for forgiveness. (Other examples of Jesus forgiving sins include Luke 5:24; 7:48-49.)

Perhaps most significant is what Paul wrote in Romans 10:9-13: "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.""

V13 is apparently a quote of Joel 2:32: "And it will come about that whoever calls upon the name of the LORD will be delivered." Notice that "LORD" in this verse is the Hebrew *YHWH* (Jehovah or Yahweh). Then, in Romans 10:13, it is translated into the Greek as *kurios* (as stated above, this is the typical Greek translation for the Hebrew *YHWH*) and rendered in English as "Lord." There is some debate on whether this is a reference to God or to Jesus. It should be noted, however, that the context of the whole passage is about Jesus and the salvation that results by faith in Him.

Regardless, notice what occurs in v9. Paul, by inspiration, specifically says that we are to confess that "Jesus is Lord." The word "Lord" here is the same Greek *kurios* as is found in v13! It is the same word translated as LORD or Jehovah or Yahweh in the Greek Septuagint. And thus the meaning should be clear: salvation involves a recognition and belief that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God, sharing in God's majesty, and rightly Himself called God. Again, as John 1:1 says, not only was Jesus with God, He was God. (Jesus is actually called Lord (*kuiros*) in numerous places throughout Scripture; see especially Philippians 2:11.)

Jesus is Eternal

Indeed Jesus is as God, who is without end or beginning. God, in Exodus 3:14, referred to His eternal nature when He said, "I AM WHO I AM." A similar statement is made by Jesus concerning Himself in John 8:57-59: "The Jews therefore said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I Am!' Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him." Notice that not only does Jesus say He existed before Abraham was born, more than 1500 years before Jesus' earthly conception, but He describes Himself in the very same manner ("I am") as God described Himself in Exodus 3:14 ("I AM"). It appears that Christ is claiming that same eternal and self-existent nature as possessed by God.

Notice these words were spoken concerning Jesus in Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever." God Himself spoke of the Son in Hebrews 1:8 and says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever."

Micah 5:2 similarly states of Jesus: "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Recall also that one of the names given to Jesus in Isaiah 9:6 is "Eternal Father." John 1:2, speaking of Jesus (though disputed by some, the context is clear that this is indeed Jesus) says, "He was in the beginning with God." In John 17:5, Jesus said, "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was." Jesus clearly indicates that He existed before the foundation of the world. (See also Genesis 1:26; John 1:15; 3:13.)

Numerous other passages indicate that Jesus was responsible for the creation of all things. Looking again at John 1, concerning Jesus, v3 says, "All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul refers to "one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." Hebrews 1:10 says of Jesus, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands."

Colossians 1:15-17 says, "And He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Some have implied that "first-born" means the first created being, but Paul himself defines the term in v16. He calls Christ the "first-born of all creation" and then explains why such a term is used: "FOR by Him all things were created."

Paul indicates that "first-born" here means that Christ is the origin of creation, not that He was the first created being. He specifically says that Christ existed before ALL created things. Were Christ actually the first thing created, then it would not be accurate to say that Christ created ALL things. [The New World Translation (Jehovah's Witness version) adds the word "other" to read "because by means of him all [other] things were created," thus giving a false meaning other than that given in the original inspired Greek text.]

Jesus the Son and God the Father are Separate and Distinct

Although the Father and the Son are both called God, they are clearly distinguished from one another. The Father is not the Son; neither is the Son the Father (likewise, the Holy Spirit is distinct from both the Father and the Son). They are two separate persons.

Numerous passages of Scripture show a distinction between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Psalm 2:7 speaks of the Lord God and His Son. Proverbs 30:4 asks, "What is His (God's) name or His son's name?"

Throughout the gospels, Jesus' own words speak of the distinction between Himself and God the Father: Matthew 11:27; 16:17; 26:39; 27:46; 28:19; Mark 13:32; 15:34; Luke 2:49; 4:18; 23:34, 46; John 3:16; 5:20, 22, 30; 6:27, 37-46; 8:18-19; 14: 6, 16, 23, 26; 15:26; 17:24; 20:17, 21. Furthermore, in Matthew 3:16-17 and 17:5, God Himself affirms such as He speaks concerning His Son. John 13:1 says that Jesus knew "that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father." Luke 6:12, John 11:41-42, and John 17:1ff speak of Jesus praying to God; would this be reasonable if there was no other distinct person?

In Acts 2:22-36, 3:13-15, and 10:34-42, Peter speaks clearly of the distinction of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. In Acts 7:55, Stephen "gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Paul says in Acts 13:33, "God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus." He declared in Acts 17:31 that God would judge the world through His Son whom He raised from the dead. In Acts 17:21, Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders about "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul writes, "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." Paul further writes about God and Jesus in numerous passages: Romans 1:1-9; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 13:14; Galatians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:18; 4:4-6; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 2:5.

The Hebrew writer also speaks in a manner that shows God and Jesus as two separate beings: Hebrews 1:1-8; 2:17; 5:5-10; 7:25; 9:14. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." John wrote in 1 John 1:3, "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." In 2 John 3, he spoke of "God the Father and ... Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." Jude 1 talks about "God the Father, and ... Jesus Christ." Finally, Revelation 1:5-6 speaks of "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness ... and ... His God and Father."

Jesus the Son and God the Father are One

In John 10:30, Jesus declared, "I and the Father are one." How can this be? If they are indeed two separate and distinct persons, in what way are they also one? Some have conjectured that this verse proves that Jesus is God, and God is Jesus, that they are not two persons. However, the concept of two (or more) being one is not uncommon to Scripture.

In John 17:20-23 Christ prayed that His followers would also be “one” with the Father and Himself. Specifically, He prayed, "...that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me."

Surely no one thinks that Jesus was praying for His apostles to become one person. Thus we acknowledge that being “one” does not mean becoming a single being, but rather it signifies unity. (This prayer is at least partly answered in Acts 2:44, etc. as it shows that “all those who had believed were together.”)

Another example is found in Genesis 2:24: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Again, this in no way suggests that the two became one person. Rather, being “one” means that a husband and wife are to be united in every sense of the word.

Does this not also then reasonably describe the relationship between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ? They are two separate and distinct persons, and yet are one. They are united in purpose, in essence, in divinity and majesty, etc. They each have specific roles to fulfill; the Son is subject to the Father (He is called the God and Father of Jesus Christ: John 20:17, Romans 15:6, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 2 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 11:31, Ephesians 1:3, Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 1:3, Hebrews 1:9, 1 Peter 1:3, Revelation 1:6, Revelation 3:12) just as the wife is to her husband, and yet both relationships are described as “one.”

Conclusion

It should be no surprise that Jesus the Son was often called by the same names used for God. The Son represented His Father to human beings; He was exactly like his Father; He stood in place of His Father; He was, in a sense, God to human beings.

Perhaps it is beyond human capability to truly understand the nature of God and His Son. This much is evident, however: God loved us so much that He gave us His Son, who died for us. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God” (1 John 3:1).

All this is possible because of Jesus, our Lord and our Savior. Whether we completely understand and agree on this issue, we know that salvation is only in Him (Acts 4:12).