

## Who Is the One God of the Bible?

**P**ick up a Bible and ask the simplest and most basic of all questions: Who is the one God of the Bible?

Deuteronomy 32:39: "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me."

Isaiah 43:11: "I, only I, am the LORD [YHVH], and there is no Savior besides Me."

Isaiah 44:6: "This is what the LORD says, He who is the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of Armies: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.'"

Isaiah 44:8: "Is there a God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none."

Isaiah 45:5: "I am the LORD, and there is no one else; there is no God except Me."

Isaiah 45:6: "So that people may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no one else."

Hosea 13:4: "I have been the LORD your God since the land of Egypt; and you were not to know any God except Me, because there is no Savior besides Me."

Deuteronomy 4:35: "You were shown these things so that you would know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him."

Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord."

Mark 12:32: The scribe said to Jesus, "Well said, teacher. You have truly stated that He is one, and there is no other besides Him."

It is perfectly obvious that Jesus confirmed the age-old creed of Israel. As every Jew knows, this creed asserts that the true God, the God of Israel, is one Person — certainly not three! Jesus subscribed to the understanding of his fellow Jews. Jesus allied himself to the Jews when he defined God. He said, "We [Jews] know whom we worship" (John 4:22). And no Jew ever worshipped the Triune God. Jesus did not deviate one inch from the unitary, non-Trinitarian monotheism of Israel. He quoted the Old Testament definition of who God is and thus presented us Christian disciples with our basic creed. It is arrogant in the extreme for us Gentile converts to Christianity to interfere with the creed declared with such clarity by Jesus himself. Note carefully how many persons there are in this creed: "The Lord our God is one Lord." One Lord is one Person, not three!

A popular theory declares that God is "one 'what' and three 'who's.'" This of course depersonalizes God. The one God is never a "what" in the Bible. He is presented as one personal being, denoted thousands and thousands of times by the personal pronouns in the singular: I, Me, Thou, Thee, He, Him. In the Bible the word "three" never occurs in connection with the word "God."

God had a unique, virginally conceived Son, the Messiah, and God's spirit is the Spirit of God, His divine presence and power active in the world to enlighten and save. But God never spoke to His own Spirit and the Spirit never sent greetings, was never worshipped nor prayed to.

Both the Father and the Son are addressed in prayer and both are worshipped, Jesus as the Messiah and the Father as the one true God. The biblical word "worship" is an "elastic" term with a meaning different from our English word "worship." David was "worshipped" alongside the one God (1 Chron. 29:20) and the saints are going to be "worshipped" by their former persecutors (Rev. 3:9). The Hebrew and Greek words for "worship" apply both to God and to persons who are not the one God, but superior human agents of the one God.

Jesus is the ultimate spokesman for God, His very image, reflecting His mind and character perfectly. But this does not mean that Jesus *is* God. If Jesus were God, this would make two Gods, a biblical impossibility. The Father is the one Lord God, and Jesus is the lord Messiah.

The distinction between the Father and the Son is brilliantly illumined for us by Psalm 110:1 where the one God, Yahweh, is a different, separate and distinct person from the lord Messiah. The lord Messiah is addressed in this prophecy as *adoni*. *Adoni* means "my lord." It never refers to God, but always to a person who is *not* God, but a human superior (occasionally an angel). If Jesus were God he would be described in this Psalm as *Adonai*, the Hebrew word used exclusively for the one God (449 times in the Old Testament).

Psalm 110:5, by contrast, depicts *Adonai*, the one God, as supporting the Messiah in his future battle for world dominance. The distinction between *adoni* and *Adonai* is maintained in every case. *Adonai* is the one God and *adoni* is never a reference to God. How very striking then that in Psalm 110:1 the Messiah Jesus is distinctly given the superior human title, not the title of eternal Deity! The Jews knew well what was at stake in any departure from the strict monotheism of the creed of Israel.

John and all the Apostles were outstanding exponents of unitary monotheism (i.e., God is a single Person). John recorded Jesus as defining the Father as the “the one who alone is truly God” (John 17:3; 5:44). It follows then that the Apostles and Jesus would have difficulty with some current mainstream religious authorities who would express horror that they were not Trinitarian following the creeds of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries!

Some try to defend post-biblical creeds by appealing to John 1:1. But they read this passage with their minds already made up that the Son of God was an uncreated eternal second Person in the Godhead. They then make the huge assumption that “the word” means the Son before his birth. But the text tells us that God’s *word*, not His Son, preexisted from the beginning. A world-known systematic theologian of Fuller Seminary, Dr. Colin Brown, said correctly: “It is a common but patent error to read John 1:1 as if it said ‘In the beginning was the *Son*.’”<sup>1</sup>

Anyone familiar with Jewish ways of thinking recognizes here a strong parallel with Wisdom which is figuratively presented as being “with God” from the beginning (Prov. 8:1, 6, 12, 14, 22, 30). Wisdom is personified (i.e. “she” speaks as though she is a person). She says “I was always with Him [God]” (Prov. 8:30). Thus the word or wisdom of God was “with God” (John 1:1) and was itself God, that is to say fully expressive of God. Wisdom says, “I am understanding” (Prov. 8:14). She is the fullest expression of the mind of God. The word “was” God, not as a one-to-one identity, because the word was also “with God,” but as fully expressive of God. The word is God in His self-revelation.

But note carefully that there is only one *Person* in John 1:1-2. It is the Father and His word/wisdom by which He created everything. Then, amazingly, in verse 14 the *Son* is introduced for the first time, and we learn of the only begotten *Son* who reveals the Father. John’s intention is to tell us that the very word/expression/wisdom/idea of God was manifested in history in a human person, *the Son* of God. Jesus is therefore what the word/wisdom of God became. Just as the car on the designer’s drawing board becomes “flesh” as a real, functioning automobile, so the wisdom/word of God was fully expressed in Jesus. Jesus is the most perfect demonstration of God speaking in a human being, but Jesus is not himself God; that is to say the Son is not an uncreated eternal Person.

There is only one such uncreated Person in the universe, and that is the Father. No wonder the Father is called “the [one] God” (*ho theos*, in Greek) over 1300 times in the New Testament. The term “God” is very occasionally applied to Jesus as reflecting God. Remember that Moses was to be “God” to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1). This does not mean that Moses *was* actually God, but that he was His spokesman. In a parallel way Jesus is the ultimate speaker for God, the supreme prophet and the chosen King of David’s royal line.

Over and over again the New Testament informs us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, a title applicable also to the converted Israel of the future (Hos. 1:10). Jesus founded his church on the firm belief that he was the “Messiah, Son of the living God.” Remember what Professor Brown of Fuller Seminary told us, along with many other expert biblical scholars: “To be called Son of God in the Bible means that you are *not* God.”<sup>2</sup> This is an obvious truth which can be searched out and confirmed by anyone. Simply note that Adam, Israel and men especially close to God are called “sons of God.” Christians are said to be “sons of God.” Jesus is the pioneer Christian, the perfect model of what it means to be “Son of God.”

Now listen to Paul: How does he define the one God in whom Christians believe? Paul repeats exactly the Old Testament one God texts quoted above. His statement defining the God of Christianity is based on the Old Testament words we have cited earlier (Deut. 32:39, etc.). Paul tells us precisely *who* that unique divine Person is: “We know that there is no God but one... To us [Christians] there is one God, the Father”

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<sup>1</sup> *Ex Auditu* 7, 1991

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

(1 Cor. 8:4-6). This is unitary monotheism. Why didn't Paul write, "There is one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit"? Paul believed that "there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Messiah Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Was Paul a Trinitarian? Hardly. He wrote: "God is only one Person" (Gal. 3:20, Amplified Version).

Paul's and Jesus' creed is strikingly different from the creed of contemporary churches which reads: "We believe in one God, existing eternally in three Persons." Listen again to Paul: "There is no God but one...There is one God — the Father" (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

The extent of the confusion about this most basic of all questions can be measured by the confident assertions of some, that unless one believes in the "historic creed" (of the church councils) that God is three in one, you are a "cult figure" and "decidedly non-Christian." It is to be regretted that Paul and Jesus would not qualify as Christian by the standards decreed by some of America's "Bible answer men." Something has gone terribly wrong!

The tragic loss of Jesus' insistence on the superlatively greatest commandment, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord," was powerfully stated by Harvard professor of Theology, Dr. Andrews Norton:

"When I am told that the same being is both God and man, I recognize, as I have before said, a very intelligible, though a very absurd proposition...When it is affirmed that 'the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God,' no words can more clearly convey any meaning, than those propositions express the meaning, that there are three existences of whom the attributes of God may be predicated, and yet there is only one existence of whom the attributes of God may be predicated. But this is not an incomprehensible mystery: it is plain nonsense."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*, 1873, p. 169-170.