

## Before Abraham was—I am? (Part One)

*Did the Jews and Jesus both agree on who and what is God? Was Jesus really the God of the “Old Testament” as some claim, and the God of the fathers, and the Yahweh (YHWH) who revealed himself to Moses? Did Jesus ever state that he was the “I am who/ what I am” who spoke to Moses? Who then was and is Jesus and the God of the Bible?*

The surety afforded to church doctrines, and how the church defines who God is, are issues predicated on the belief that God founded the church upon his son Jesus, being the chief cornerstone, and all doctrines and beliefs of that church are understood—without reservation—to be based on the agreement between the prophets and the apostles. For the Apostle Paul tells us that “after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:14-15).

However, the problem we face today, as can also be demonstrated throughout “church” history, is that the so-called Christian church has embraced many different doctrines and beliefs—consisting of many conflicting and contradictory conclusions—and those who profess to agree with these doctrines, or a selection of stated beliefs, find themselves divided organizationally, and in many respects, unwittingly self-deceived by the acceptance of non-biblical rituals, ceremonies and traditions.

Consequently, what we discover by examining Christianity today is the growing necessity to prepare official “statements” of beliefs for nearly every denomination, and also for church affiliates within denominations, as well as for the various

independent congregations around the world. Thereby giving current followers and prospective members a means to pick and choose a church congregation, and to perhaps make a selection of doctrines they feel are correct according to their own understanding of the Bible.

Including those teachings that suit their own personal and acquired views about the “God of my fathers” worshipped by the Apostle Paul.

Allowing us to say that these published doctrinal distinctions have generally served to document an historically divided Christianity, and an apparent dividing of the body of Christ, which in modern times has lost any real sense of influence in the world when it comes to explaining human nature—and the reason for our existence—and how this relates to the resurrection of the “just and unjust.” For seldom do we see, particularly in recent decades, the Christian church able to publicly voice a concerted argument and defense of biblical doctrines because much of Christianity has embraced the language of social and political thinking, making right and wrong a subjective matter framed by outside influences, instead of by what is found in the Bible.

Raising the issue of why some people choose to participate in a specific church organization in the first place. Knowing that if they don’t care for a congregation they are presently attending, they can form or join another to their liking, giving the impression that Christianity is unsettled about its governance, doctrines and teachings from the Bible.

This, of course, can affect the way some people see their “calling,” which in reality may have only been based on an emotional response to a sudden recognition of their guilt before God, having little substance in regard to a God-given repentance. Or, they

may have simply grown up in a church affiliation and accepted without thought its doctrines and beliefs, assuming they have proved them sufficiently to themselves, and perhaps over time they find themselves choosing baptism in that church as a way of showing their conviction to follow Christ (Acts 2:42, 4:33; Eph. 2:20-22). [Author's emphasis throughout.]

In any case, such scenarios give us reason to consider that many professing Christians have probably never really taken the time to think about whether or not their doctrines and beliefs can be substantiated from the Bible.

Consequently, some well-meaning people may or may not have considered what they are being baptized into and for what reason, as they are not likely thinking about being baptized into “the way which some call heresy” as described by the Apostle Paul. Leaving us to further consider that many Christians may not be baptized to Jesus—for the remission of sins—but are instead baptized to a statement of beliefs, or to a selected set of doctrines, or to an inviting and familiar congregation, or simply to a nostalgic time in their church association, or perhaps even to a charismatic church leadership they regard as having the truth about God.

Situations that may well affect how people understand their conversion and define salvation, and also how they might choose to interpret the Bible.

Bringing us then to the gravity of what it means to be baptized to Jesus.

Because if a person should claim they are baptized to Jesus and [be of Jesus' baptism](#), then that individual is surely compelled to define who and what is Jesus, and also who and what is the God who sent Jesus into the world to make it possible to attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Knowing also that within Christianity—currently and through the ages—there has

always existed a confused mixture of beliefs about who and what is God, and how Jesus, as the son of God, fits into the scheme of defining what we mean by God. For there are those who claim that God is One, and there is one God, but they also claim that Jesus is a separate and distinct individual who was and is also God—apart from God the Father—while also believing that Jesus confessed himself to be the “I am” who spoke to Moses.

What, then, does the Bible tell us about Jesus and God the Father? Do the prophets and apostles agree [on who God is](#) and whether or not Jesus is God, or the son of God?

We can begin to look at this subject by reviewing some conversations between Jesus and his disciples and those in the Jewish community who were puzzled over the identity of Jesus, which started soon after he began his ministry during the season of unleavened bread. For we see that even Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, and a Pharisee, had about that time brought into question the identity of Jesus as a result of the miracles the people witnessed at Jerusalem.

Which brings us to an interesting conversation Jesus had with his disciples.

Now, Jesus asked his disciples what the people were saying about who Jesus was, and they told him that some thought him to be Elijah or one of the older prophets brought back to life. But when they were directly asked the same question—to define who Jesus was—Peter answered in a way that even the Jews would not misunderstand or misinterpret.

So, Peter answered and confessed that Jesus was “the Christ of God” (Lk. 9:20).

Making no claim that Jesus was God.

Did Peter then answer in a misleading way by omitting such an important identifying factor about Jesus?

Not at all.

Because if the people had heard Peter's response regarding Jesus, they would not have thought Peter to mean that Jesus was God, because what Peter stated was in compliance with the prophets, and so Jesus instructed them to not voice this truth to others at that time. (Even the Jews condemned Jesus for claiming to be the "son of God" (Jn.19:7).)

However, by the time of the feast Jesus had gained some notable reputation among the people, but many of the leaders in the community were still perplexed and could not discern if Jesus was one of the prophets or the prophesied Messiah. And, so, we are brought to a confrontive conversation between Jesus and some of the Pharisees regarding the covenant made with Abraham, and Jesus said: "to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (Jn. 8:31-33.)

Now, the Pharisees knew they were not the children of the bondservant, but of Sarah, and therefore heirs according to the promises passed down through Isaac. Therefore, they did not see themselves outside the promise of a lineal inheritance in the land promised to Abraham. For the Pharisees thought it sufficient to be "born" into the line of Abraham in regard to the "everlasting" covenant made with Abraham.

Creating an obvious misunderstanding about what Jesus was talking about, and indeed it would have expectedly been a somewhat cryptic statement to many of those Jews who heard him. Because here we have a foundational issue for understanding the biblical subjects of conversion and salvation for those who would eventually be baptized to Jesus and who would continue in his word, and as we can see from Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees of his day it

presented a stark contrast to those who were baptized unto Moses (I Cor. 10:1-5).

For even though Jesus used events of Israel's own history as metaphors to define who he was to the Jews, they still saw the Messiah as a deliverer and not as a sacrifice that would replace the blood of bulls and goats, which would give them a sacrifice for the imputing of their sins, and setting them free from the bondage of sin. This we glean from the conversation when Jesus spoke of being "lifted up" and by this they would come to understand who Jesus was (Isa. 52:13-15; 53:1-12; Jn. 8:34-40; Heb. 10:4).

That is to define Jesus as the [foretold servant of God](#), and the lamb of God spoken of by John the Baptist.

Something Peter understood as he saw Jesus for who he was—the Christ of God—the one understood to be slain from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34; Rev. 13:8).

Which was an issue capitalized on by the Apostle Paul when he spoke of "spiritual" meat and drink, using God's provision in the wilderness to create a metaphor of Jesus. Noting that the people of Israel only consumed "actual" food and the water that sprang from an actual rock, which faithfully attended to them while they were in the wilderness. For at no time did the people of Israel ever receive the spirit of God, or have the spirit of God working in them as a result of the baptism of Jesus, but what they did have with them was the "I am," the God of the fathers who spoke to Moses.

Noting importantly in his discussion with the Pharisees that Jesus did not make a direct claim to being God himself, because the Jews knew well the position of Moses and the prophets that God was the Father (Jn. 8:41).

Jesus accepted the same (Jn. 8:53-54).

Consequently, Jesus did not come to reveal the [Father as an unknown God](#), as some

have incorrectly assumed, based on a misguided interpretation of what Jesus said to the Jews, but rather Jesus, as did the prophets, revealed the will of God to the people of Israel, with the one exception being that God was in Christ (Jn. 1:1, 18; 5:43; II Cor. 5:17-19; Heb. 1:1-2). (The *Logos* is not a person other than God, but is rather the eternal living utterance of God, given life by the Holy Spirit, from which the voice of God is made manifest to his creation (Jn. 1:4).)

Confirmed by the agreed witness of John the Baptist and Jesus—the prophet and the apostle—who saw a manifestation of the spirit of God descending upon Jesus, which had come from the Father and his eternal utterance, which Jesus, and understandably John, also witnessed when God said, “and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:11, see also Mk. 9:7).

Then, what we have in the growing argument between Jesus and the Pharisees was the issue of the authority by which he spoke, and the validity of his testimony, because there was the expectation of two witnesses to the truth of a matter. Leading to the point made by Jesus that what he said was true because he received it from God, and to confirm this he said he was not alone in his testimony, and we have an understanding of this because God was in Christ (Jn. 8:12-18, 23-29).

What followed in John’s record is the issue of sin as it related to Jesus’ message, and how it related to the perpetual inheritance promised to Abraham. That is to say that Jesus had the truth and it was through him they could be free from sin, but if they would not accept him, they would indeed die in their sins.

Now, Jesus as a descendant of Abraham, was also an inheritor, and he had been sent by God to set them free from being a bondservant—that is a servant to sin—which as the law revealed stood in the way of their inheritance, which is to say the perpetuity of that inheritance, which gives us the

expectation of a resurrection of the just and unjust (Heb. 9:26).

The Pharisees also had some awareness of this as they knew they could not keep the covenant perfectly, as the foundational stipulations of the covenant historically proved, and so in time they had added “works of the law,” or precepts of the Torah, as a means to support their keeping of the law of Moses. These rules, in a sense, were a manifestation of their hypocrisy, for according to Paul it was not possible that righteousness was a result of the works of the law, which left only one way to be justified and made free, and that was through the sacrifice of Christ (Jn. 14:12-16; Gal. 2:16). (The “works of the law” were tedious and burdensome ritualistic observances and not a reference to the Ten Commandments (stipulations), or to the personal efforts one applies in keeping them as some have supposed.)

Consequently, this disparate view of the Abrahamic covenant by those who were confronting Jesus brought them to conclude that Jesus was claiming a personal covenant through him was necessary and subsequently greater than the covenant established with Abraham (Jn. 8:38-39).

This, of course, made it appear to the Pharisees that Jesus was a challenger to the authority of Abraham, as Jesus had also pointed out that their rejection of the truth made them the children of the devil, which caused the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees to become more heated. But it didn’t stop there, as Jesus challenged their thinking further by saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death” (Jn. 8:51).

Implying an “everlasting” inheritance through Jesus (Gen. 17:8).

Placing the words of Jesus in contrast to how they understood the promises given to Abraham, as Abraham had already died, which highlighted the difference between a strictly lineal covenant and a perpetual covenant, with the latter being associated

with a resurrection of the dead. For the Jews knew that the one seed was Isaac, and through him came the covenant, but Jesus' comments showed that the perpetuity of the inheritance was through him.

Thus, Jesus was claiming to be the “one seed” by which Abraham himself would receive the promise of an inheritance, keeping in mind that both Isaac and Jesus were children of promise to Abraham. The implications of this, in contrast to the beliefs of the Sadducees, was that through Jesus it would be possible for Abraham to be resurrected from the dead, as confirmed by the Apostle Paul.

This, of course, prompted a response from the Pharisees who asked: “Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?” (Jn. 8:53.)

These questions are clear and to the point.

Was Jesus greater than the prophets and was his authority in regard to the nature of the inheritance greater than that of Abraham?

This was followed by another important question.

Who was Jesus claiming to be?

Now, within Christianity we see little argument about Jesus being the son of God, as Jesus and the apostles made this abundantly clear, but the question that arises is whether Jesus himself claimed to be God, and not only God, but the God of Abraham who spoke to Moses.

Bringing us then to examine a statement made by Jesus that some believe is proof that Jesus claimed to be the God of the fathers and the God of Moses.

We read this in the book of John where Jesus said: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw *it*, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not

yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (Jn. 8:56-59).

Now, it should be understood that Abraham knew that such a prophet as Jesus would arise from his lineage as it was part and parcel with the promises given to him by God. And, he knew what this meant for him and his lineage to receive a perpetual inheritance, as this is confirmed by the writings of the apostles who tell us that: “by faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:9-10).

Showing that the resurrection was requisite to the fulfilling of the promises and inheriting the kingdom of God.

However, when the Jews heard Jesus state that “before Abraham was, I am,” they thought Jesus was claiming to have had a beginning that preceded Abraham, and so they challenged his age to refute what they had interpreted from what Jesus had said. But Jesus qualified his statement when he pointed out that Abraham “rejoiced to see” the day of Jesus—not that he saw Jesus—and Jesus made it plain that this day had come, which was confirmed in the gospel message when Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God was “at hand” and calling upon people to repent of their sins and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15). (David also foresaw Jesus by means of the promises, but Jesus was not alive in the days of David’s rule (Acts 2:25-28).)

Therefore, from the context given by Jesus we can say that he never claimed to be alive in the days of Abraham. But then there are those who would ignore this context and point out that Jesus said he was the “I am” who was the God of the fathers and also of Moses.

Instead of being the “Christ of God” as stated by Peter.

This interpretation comes to us in part from the view that Jesus was co-creator, and was the acting voice of the Father that was heard by Moses and others, assuming that Christ was God instead of accepting Paul’s view that God was in Christ. Such an assumption is developed from Jesus’ words when he said to the Jews that they had not heard God’s voice, and they had not seen him or any manifestation of him as well, and thereby a misleading interpretation is made that Jesus was a stand-in spokesman for the actual voice of God throughout Scripture (Jn. 5:37).

However, Jesus statement applied only to those who heard him, and it does not apply to Moses and others who had heard God, and had also seen manifestations of God’s glory as on the mount in Sinai and in the transfiguration with the disciples of Jesus.

Also, the Bible does not support the idea of a co-creator, as Jesus is noted as stating that God, whom he and the Jews knew as the Father, was the One who created all things in the beginning, even to the time of a future world tribulation (Mk. 13:19).

Therefore, we are brought to address the question of whether or not Jesus actually claimed to be the “I am” who spoke to Moses. ✍️ ([andrewburdettewrites.com](http://andrewburdettewrites.com))