

Before Abraham was—I am? (Part Two)

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?

We do not find in the book of John a definitive statement made by Jesus that he is God, and in the context of his argument with the Pharisees we see that both he and the Jews affirmed that God was the Father. However, what we do find in Jesus’ conversation with the Pharisees is that Jesus uttered the expression “before Abraham was, I am” as a means to affirm the strength and authority of his testimony.

Now, unlike Jesus’ other statements where he used the words “I am” with qualifying clauses that created metaphors for his life (manna, bread of life)—sometimes referred to as the “seven I am(s)” —we do not have such a conditional clause when Jesus affirmed he was the one Abraham foresaw as a matter of faith in the promises of God.

Bringing us to ask if Jesus was implying an existence that preceded Abraham—making him a contemporary of Abraham—which allowed the Pharisees to confusingly think Jesus was claiming to be alive in the days of Abraham.

Now, in discussing the meaning of what Jesus said, we find some people using the term “pre-existence” to describe the life of Jesus before being born of Mary, assuming he was once an all-knowing, all-powerful co-creator spirit-being, who then transformed into a humanly limited god/man-being, whose life ceased to exist, requiring a resurrection back to a god/man-being who

was eventually transformed into a lesser spirit-being compared to God the Father.

The absurdity of this ought to be obvious when compared to what we find in Scripture.

The problem with a term like “pre-existence” is that it does not match anything described in the Bible, and the term does not hold up under the scrutiny of examination, because respective to Jesus a pre-existence would imply a current-existence, with no-existence, then a re-existence and finally a post-existence—in various forms and capacities—all in the lifetime of the Apostle John.

It represents at best a mixture of confused and unfounded interpretations—while implying the possibility of additional unknown existences—which is certainly not what is presented to us from the Bible.

What the Bible does present to us has no conflict of interpretation—as it is based on the agreement between the prophets and the apostles—and it tells us that Jesus was conceived of the holy spirit and was born of Mary, years later he died and was resurrected by the Father, becoming the firstborn of “many brethren,” whereupon he was given an immortal and incorruptible spiritual body, made a quickening spirit, and entrusted with the power to impart the holy spirit and resurrect us from the dead (1 Jn. 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:45).

If, however, we think of Jesus in terms of a “pre-existent” god-being then it implies Jesus is a lesser God than the Father, and if this pre-existent god-being is said to be the “I am,” then he who codified the law on tablets of stone didn’t understand “obedience” or suffering until he learned it as a human being, which further implies that God didn’t know what he was creating until he experienced temptation himself. And, if Jesus had a “pre-existent” form prior to his birth, and he had to be “qualified” to replace

Satan, and to be qualified to inherit the throne of his father David—ruling the nations—and also to be qualified to become the mediator between God and humankind, then it would tell us that Jesus—as the supposed co-creator—was subordinate to the devil and unable to govern his creation until he was qualified of God (Lk. 1:32; Eph. 2:1-3; I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 5:8). (Such ideas certainly challenge what some people think they mean by “fully God,” and “fully man.”)

Are the contradictions of a “pre-existent” Jesus not evident?

Now, according to the Bible, God has a continuous and uninterrupted eternal existence, and his beginning and ending have no measure, and God himself expresses to us that his character is also continuous and unwavering when he said, “for I am the Lord [*Yahweh*], I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). Telling us in no uncertain terms that God does not have to be qualified to rule or to learn obedience, and his eternal existence is affirmed in the memorial that is his name, being the same name by which God identified himself to Moses, and by his proclamation identified himself as the God (*El Shaddai*) of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 6:2-3).

But the same is not said of Jesus.

Noting in Luke’s account of Jesus’ beginning—confirmed as such by his research and collection of accounts related to Jesus—that Mary knew Jesus was a consequence of the holy spirit causing a conception in her body. This is how Jesus is understood to be “from above,” and one who “came down from heaven,” and who “came out from God,” making him the “only begotten” of God the Father, in whose name we are to believe (Jn. 3:16-18).

Continuing then in Luke’s account we read what the angel told Mary, “and the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son,

and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:30-33). (Jesus was the child of Mary who had legitimate siblings, and therefore Mary was not the mother of God, but the one who gave birth to the Christ of God, and as no “man” has entered into heaven except Jesus, it is also true that no man ever came out from heaven in the first place (Jn. 3:13-18; 8:23; 18:36; Rom 12:2; I Jn. 1:3).) [Author’s emphasis throughout.]

Thus, Jesus came as a matter of spiritual conception and not as a matter of material transformation, and he demonstrated his character and willingness to obey the Father throughout his lifetime and his ministry, and so the apostles spoke of him as being the same yesterday, today and forever, which allows us to know what Jesus is like, and what he is willing to do for us now. By such a conclusion the book of Hebrews does not contradict the writings of Luke by in some way stating that Jesus had no conception, but rather the book of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus was not a transformed or “pre-existent” being as some believe in Christianity today.

Bringing us back again to the question: Did Jesus imply that his life was understood to be—as compared to that of Abraham—equated with the “I am” who spoke to Moses?

To address this issue we must determine if the phrase “I am” in John’s account is equivalent to the identifying memorial, “I am who/what I am,” who spoke to Moses.

First, we will notice something Jesus said to Mary who came to his tomb after his resurrection, “and Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (Jn. 20:17).

It is clear from what Jesus said regarding himself and God, that he—like his brethren—had a God who was the Father, and the same was true of Mary in every respect, for she had the same God. Therefore, it was to the Father’s throne that Jesus was exalted and from that throne he was given the power to impart the holy spirit and to resurrect us from the dead (Acts 2:33, 26:6-8).

Second, this distinction was elaborated on by the one who anointed Paul for a ministry and he said to Paul: “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth [Jesus’ voice]” (Acts 22:14). And, it was the Apostle Paul who defined this “God of our fathers” as the same God who chose the people of Israel and brought them out of the land of Egypt (Gen. 48:15; Acts 13:17).

Therefore, from the perspective of the apostles, including Jesus, there is one who is called God, and who is the Father, and they associate this God with Mary and the brethren, and he is affirmed to be the same God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt. And, at no point do they associate Jesus with this One who is referred to as God, and therefore according to the apostles, Jesus cannot be the God who spoke to Moses.

Now, the Apostle Peter tells us that the God of the fathers raised up Jesus from the dead, and afterward glorified him and set him on his throne, and in addressing the crowd on Pentecost Peter said: “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *him* go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:13-15, also Acts 5:30).

Without a doubt then it was God who glorified Jesus, who resurrected him, and this was the Father, and the God of the fathers, and the God of Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob—and Moses. And, it was to Moses that God gave the knowledge to foretell of Jesus’ existence, which was the same foretold existence that Abraham looked to with joy, and Moses tells us that: “a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, *that* every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:22-23; also Acts 7:2). (Moses implies that Jesus, a future prophet like Moses, whom they will hear, is someone other than the God whom they had already heard while at the mount in the Sinai.)

Making it abundantly clear that Moses never heard Jesus, nor met and talked with him, because he had not at that time been raised “up unto you of your brethren,” and yet it was Moses who spoke with the One called the “I am,” who was the God of the fathers and of Abraham (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2-3; Lk. 9:28-36).

Allowing us to say that Jesus’ existence was looked forward to by both Abraham and Moses, and this was taught to the fathers and to the people of Israel, and reiterated by King David, and this was understandably what the Jews were looking for when asking if John the Baptist was “that prophet” spoken of by Moses (Jn. 1:21; 6:14).

Noting importantly that if Jesus was that prophet, then he was not the God who would raise up such a prophet “of your brethren” according to Moses (John 5:46).

Allowing us to conclude that the God who sent Jesus was the God who sent Moses and also John the Baptist, and he was the God spoken of by the apostles as we have seen, and he was the God of the prophets who later spoke to us by a son. And, importantly again, this God describes himself in specific terms to Moses, so there is no mistaking him for those things that are seen or thought of as gods, as this was initially a conflicting issue with Moses (Heb. 1:1-2).

For we read what Moses said to God:

“Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I am that I am [Eheyeh asher Eheyeh]: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I am [hayah] hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God [Yahweh Elohim] of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations (Ex. 3:13-15).

Clearly there is no other verse in the Bible that describes the singularity of God more than what is recorded here in the book of Exodus, and this was confirmed exactly as such by the Apostle Paul, and by the prophets to be the one creator God. An understanding upheld by God’s name, that he is the *Elohim* who spoke with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and as it is in part a term of personal identity, we see that Jesus does not assume this same identity to himself (Mal. 2:10; I Cor. 8:6).

For we see in Exodus that God refers to himself as *Yehovah Elohim*, the Lord God, and as Moses the prophet understood God, so did the Apostle Paul, who said “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ*” (Eph. 4:4-7). (Here one means one, and so there is only One being who is God, and Jesus is currently the one mediator of the personal covenant between us and God. Also, to assume the Shema does not mean numerically one makes it difficult to explain what the other numbers (2, 3, 4...) represent by comparison (Deut. 6:4).)

Now, it is true that *Elohim* is a plural word, and not a collective noun (uni-plural) or singular, but it nevertheless does not indicate

a plurality of God, only a multiplicity about God, as in nature, majesty and excellency. And, in regard to God the word *Elohim*, when it is construed with a verb in the singular, it is also understood to be singular in sense, as it was used by both the prophets and apostles of God. Meaning that what we learn from the Bible is that there is a consistency of conclusions about God from the prophets and the apostles, but within Christianity today we see a diversity of beliefs about Jesus and God.

Clouding the issue of what is meant by conversion and salvation, and deflecting people away from what some have referred to as an incredible human potential.

Made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Therefore, we are prompted by such a calling to examine this further and see how an ancestor of Jesus came to define the God of Moses, and the One who addressed himself as *Yahweh*. This was King David of Israel. A ruler considered to be a man after God’s own heart, and throughout his writings he defined in thoughtful terms who God is and how he relates to Jesus (I Sam. 13:14).

An example is found in David’s prayer regarding Solomon, when he said: “Oh Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee: And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision” (I Chron. 29:18-19).

Now, we notice that David is speaking about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he calls him *Yahweh Elohim*, and he was the One who codified the commandments for Moses at the mount in the Sinai.

However, this was not an arbitrary statement made by David, as he himself had asked the same question about God.

Just as we also do today.

We see this in the book of Samuel where David is quoted as saying: “As for God, his way *is* perfect; the word of the Lord *is* tried: he *is* a buckler to all them that trust in him. For who *is* God, save the Lord [Yahweh]? and who *is* a rock, save our God [Elohim]? God *is* my strength *and* power: and he maketh my way perfect” (II Sam. 22:31-33).

Now, let’s get this clearly in mind.

David is speaking of God in the singular sense, and he is asking the question, “Who is God except for *Yahweh*?”

It is a rhetorical question that challenges anyone to demonstrate there is another being who is God, someone other than *Yahweh*.

Implying, of course, by his question there is one who is God, and that God is *Yahweh*, and he is the “I am” who spoke to Moses and the one who resurrected Jesus.

Allowing us to conclude there is no other being who is God.

Therefore, when Jesus said “before Abraham was, I am,” he could not have been claiming or implying that he was *Yahweh*—assuming the name and identity of the Father—because he had already acknowledged to the Jews that God was the Father.

But, let’s look at this a little more to see how David clarified for us the identity of God.

Now, there came a time when David would choose a successor to the commonwealth kingdom, and he made sure by all public and administrative means that it would fall to Solomon. So, David created an assembly of witnesses that tells us something about how David and the people understood God. “Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: *As for me*, I *had* in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the

covenant of the Lord [*Yahweh*], and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God [*Elohim*] said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou *hast been* a man of war, and hast shed blood.”

Then David continued by saying, “and he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day. Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave *it* for an inheritance for your children after you for ever” (I Chron. 28:2-3, 6-8). (We notice that David highlights the promise to Abraham, which the Jews used as their position to argue against being bondservants when speaking with Jesus.)

What is significant about this scenario is that David brought in witnesses who represented all the tribes of Israel, his children, administrators, the military leaders and others, and in this setting he addressed the witnesses with references to the Lord God (*Yahweh Elohim*). In doing so, we see that David informs them of God’s words regarding the promises, and he makes note of how God chose Solomon to be his son, and God would “be his father,” which is not something that Jesus could make a claim to as he is not *Yahweh* the creator God.

Showing also that all the witnesses were understandably in agreement with David as to who is God.

Bringing us then to see how David came to define God, and as a prophet he could not say anything that would later contradict the conclusions of the apostles in how they defined God. And, so we read in the Chronicles of the kings the words of David’s prayer: “Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said,

Blessed *be* thou, Lord God [Yahweh Elohim] of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, *is* the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; thine *is* the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all (I Chron. 29:10-11).

It is without question then that David defines God as *Yahweh Elohim*—the God of Israel—and the creator and owner of all the creation, and the kingdom to come, and he is above all and he is God the Father.

This was the “God of my fathers” described by Paul, and it is Paul who states that this same God is the God and father of Jesus (Eph. 1:3).

Meaning that the Father only is God.

For in this point the Apostle Paul agrees with the prophet Isaiah who recorded the prayer of King Hezekiah, who said: “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth” (Isa. 37:16; also Isa. 44:6-8).

Therefore, it was not possible for Jesus to claim before the Jews that he was *Yahweh Elohim* by using the phrase “I am” in a relative sense to the existence of Abraham.

Allowing us to further conclude that Jesus did not and could not use the term “I am” to create the notion of having a “pre-existence,” or to imply he had a continuous and uninterrupted eternal existence by associating himself with the name and title of *Yahweh Elohim*. Because when Jesus stood before the Pharisees, and declared that God was the Father, to which the Jews agreed, the only One who could claim an actual existence before the forefather Abraham was the God who was in Christ (Heb. 1:1-4; 3:1-6). (Remember that a “spokesperson” cannot claim to be someone other than themselves (Jn. 14:24).)

However, Jesus did confirm he was the prophet foretold by Moses, and he not only had a foretold existence, but Jesus—as the beginning of the creation—had a foreordained existence with God. For God loved Jesus before the foundation of the world, and Peter states that Jesus: “was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (I Pt. 1:20-21). (To be foreordained does not carry the same meaning as the misleading term “pre-existence,” and so Jesus was known beforehand of God, and foreseen through faith by David, Moses and Abraham, but was not manifest until conceived of the holy spirit and born of Mary.)

Meaning also that the “last Adam” was foreordained before the creation and existence of the “first man Adam,” and Jesus was—according to Luke’s account—a lineal descendant of Adam (I Cor. 8:5-6; 15:45). Which allows us to further conclude that God ordained that Abraham—who was chosen and tested of God—would have a descendant (seed) and an heir through whom the world would be blessed, and Jesus was indeed foreordained before the time of Abraham to be that descendant (seed) and heir that would fulfill this promise made to Abraham.

Thus, Jesus was indeed known of God before Abraham, but was made apparent “in these last times for you,” and it is he who makes it possible to believe in God, and this is what confronted the Jews of Jesus’ day. And, as Jesus was given glory, and an incorruptible spiritual body, as is also promised to us, it allowed the Apostle John to say that we will be like him, and so we are brought to consider that we are not to become God, but rather the children of God (I Jn. 3:1-2).

The reason for this distinction is simple to follow.

Because God has a continuous existence, and has no understandable beginning or end. But Jesus did, as do we, and our glory,

like Jesus' glory, is to be bestowed upon us,
and if given by God then God would have
the power to take it away—except it remain
by an unshakeable promise from God. 
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