

March 1994

Frank W. Nelte

GOD IN THE O.T. AND THE JEWISH UNDERSTANDING

1) In the New Testament we are told that NOBODY had known God the Father except those to whom JESUS CHRIST revealed the Father. This is made clear in several scriptures.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and [he] to whomsoever the Son will reveal [him]. (Matthew 11:27)

All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and [he] to whom the Son will reveal [him]. (Luke 10:22)

This indicates that during Old Testament times nobody knew that there was a Being called "God the Father" EXCEPT THOSE TO WHOM JESUS CHRIST MAY HAVE CHOSEN TO REVEAL THIS!

2) Amongst other things, Christ came at His first coming TO REVEAL (literally: to uncover) the Father to mankind, to tell human beings that there is someone called "God the Father", and that the "Father" was over Jesus Christ in authority.

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come [again] unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. (John 14:28)

In this verse the word translated "greater" is the Greek comparative adjective "MEIZON" and it clearly means "higher in authority", rather than "greater in size".

This authority-structure is also made clear in 1Corinthians 15. There we are told by Paul that once "the end ones" have attained unto salvation, then Christ will hand control over the kingdom of God over to God the Father.

Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. (1 Corinthians 15:24-25)

God the Father, who put all things under the authority of Jesus Christ, is Himself obviously still OVER Jesus Christ in authority. The next few verses make this very clear.

For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under [him, it is] manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:27-28)

3) Christ spent His whole earthly ministry teaching His apostles about God the Father. Early in His ministry He had explained to them that we were to pray to the Father.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
(Matthew 6:9)

Yet towards the end of His ministry they still didn't really understand about God the Father.

Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou [then], Shew us the Father? (John 14:8-9)

A little later Jesus elaborated further.

These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. (John 16:25-29)

4) All of the apostles were Jews, and they had grown up believing in one God, but they still had a hard time understanding about God the Father. Why? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the God of Old Testament Israel was NOT God the Father! The Father was basically unknown in O.T. times.

The apostle Paul explained about Israel wandering in the wilderness in the days of Moses. He wrote:

And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:4)

The God who dealt with the Israelites in Egypt and then in the wilderness and then on throughout their history was Jesus Christ, NOT God the Father. This is something the Church of God has understood since Mr. Armstrong's time.

This understanding explains Christ's statement in John 5:37.

And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. (John 5:37)

The shape Moses had seen in Exodus 33 ...

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, [there is] a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

(Exodus 33:18-23)

... was that of Jesus Christ; and the voice that people at ANY time had heard (i.e. Abraham, the nation Israel, etc.) was either Jesus Christ speaking, or it was the voice of an angel.

Now let's look at Exodus chapter 20.

5) Notice what Exodus 20 actually says:

And God spake all these words, saying, I [am] the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
(Exodus 20:1-3)

A) WHO was speaking those words? The answer is JESUS CHRIST!

B) HOW does Christ identify Himself to Israel? The answer is as the "YHWH your Elohim who has brought Israel out of Egypt".

THIS IDENTIFICATION IS VITALLY IMPORTANT!

C) WHY is this identification embedded in the 10 commandments?

We'll see the reason for this in a little while.

D) WHAT does Exodus 20:3 actually mean? ... "You shall have no other gods BEFORE ME"? WHO is saying these words?

Is Jesus Christ, the Speaker of these verses, saying: "you shall have no other gods before God the Father"? NO, that is not what He said! Christ said to Israel: "before ME"!

Can we grasp the clear significance of Exodus 20:3 ? Israel had no idea that there was a "God the Father" He had not been revealed to them by Christ. Jesus Christ Himself was dealing with the nation of Israel, and He told them not to have any other gods before Him, Jesus Christ. He chose to reveal Himself to them as "YHWH, your Elohim" who had brought them out of Egypt.

E) Was Christ putting Himself ahead of God the Father by instructing Israel to worship Him, Jesus Christ? NO, not at all! God the Father and Jesus Christ had decided and agreed that:

- Christ would be the One to do all the creating;
- Christ would be the One to deal with mankind until the whole plan of salvation was completed;
- Christ would reveal Himself to Israel;
- Christ would, prior to His first coming, keep the existence of the Father hidden from Israel in general;
- In O.T. times Christ would only reveal the Father's existence to a very few selected individuals, for God's own reasons;
- Only at His first coming would Christ reveal the existence of God the Father to mankind;

- Together with revealing the Father's existence, Christ would point mankind towards worshipping the Father as the One in supreme authority.

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come [again] unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. (John 14:28)

- Christ also instructed mankind to address ALL REQUESTS to the Father.

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give [it] you. (John 16:23); etc.

- But only once the plan of salvation had been brought to completion would God the Father come into contact with mankind and ..."be their God".

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God. (Revelation 21:3)

- At THAT time Christ would hand over the kingdom to God the Father.

Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:24)

It might be interesting to examine this particular verse a little more closely. Here is the Stephens Received Text of 1550:

eita to telos hotan parado ten basileian to theo kai patri hotan katargese pasan archen kai pasan exousian kai dunamin (1 Corinthians 15:24 TR)

The Greek "parado" is second aorist active subjunctive of the verb "paradidomi". In Greek the subjunctive mood is used to express either possibility or potentiality. Coupled with the word "hotan" (i.e. "when"), this expresses uncertainty as to the exact time of this event. In plain English: Paul clearly understood THE EVENTS that would occur, but he was still uncertain as to exactly WHEN they would occur.

The expression "to theo kai patri", translated as "to God, even the Father", makes clear that the kingdom BELONGS TO God the Father.

The point of this verse is that until Christ actually hands the kingdom over to the Father, He is the One to fully administer it; to run things as the "Chief Executive", on the Father's behalf.

6) The God to whom the people of Israel prayed in Old Testament times was Jesus Christ. He was the One who intervened for them and helped them and also punished them. Time and time again He is identified as "the God who had brought them out of Egypt". This very pinpointed identification is used right throughout the Old Testament. In addition to Exodus 20:2 here are 40 other verses where this form of identifying the God of Israel is used:

And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: (Exodus 16:6)

And they shall know that I [am] the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I [am] the LORD their God. (Exodus 29:46)

Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I [am] the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19:36)

That brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I [am] the LORD. (Leviticus 22:33)

That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I [am] the LORD your God. (Leviticus 23:43)

I [am] the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, [and] to be your God. (Leviticus 25:38)

For unto me the children of Israel [are] servants; they [are] my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I [am] the LORD your God. (Leviticus 25:55)

I [am] the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright. (Leviticus 26:13)

But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I [am] the LORD. (Leviticus 26:45)

I [am] the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Deuteronomy 5:6)

And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and [that] the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:15)

[Then] beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Deuteronomy 6:12)

Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; (Deuteronomy 8:14)

And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn [you] away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee. (Deuteronomy 13:5)

And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Deuteronomy 13:10)

When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, [and] a

people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God [is] with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 20:1)

Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt: (Deuteronomy 29:25)

For the LORD our God, he [it is] that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: (Joshua 24:17)

And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. (Judges 2:1)

And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that [were] round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. (Judges 2:12)

And Samuel said unto the people, [It is] the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. (1 Samuel 12:6)

And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein [is] the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. (1 Kings 8:21)

And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil. (1 Kings 9:9)

For [so] it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, (2 Kings 17:7)

But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. (2 Kings 17:36)

Since the day that I brought forth my people out of the land of Egypt I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build an house in, that my name might be there; neither chose I any man to be a ruler over my people Israel: (2 Chronicles 6:5)

And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them. (2 Chronicles 7:22)

I [am] the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. (Psalm 81:10)

Neither said they, Where [is] the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? (Jeremiah 2:6)

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: (Jeremiah 7:22)

Which I commanded your fathers in the day [that] I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: (Jeremiah 11:4)

For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day [that] I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, [even] unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. (Jeremiah 11:7)

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; (Jeremiah 16:14)

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; (Jeremiah 23:7)

And hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror; (Jeremiah 32:21)

Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, (Jeremiah 34:13)

Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. (Ezekiel 20:10)

And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. (Daniel 9:15)

[Are] ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the LORD. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir? (Amos 9:7)

For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. (Micah 6:4)

Even when Israel went into idolatry, it was in the form of a challenge to the God "who had brought them out of Egypt". Notice these two occasions:

And he received [them] at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These [be] thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (Exodus 32:4)

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves [of] gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (1 Kings 12:28)

7) We should understand that Israel only knew of the existence of ONE God. They knew Him as the Creator of all things and they identified Him as "the God who had brought them out of Egypt". And that is the God Israel worshipped. He was their "LORD"!

But just because Israel did not KNOW that there was in fact another God-Being "greater" than Jesus Christ, does not mean that God the Father did not exist as a separate Being during Old Testament times. Deuteronomy 29:29, already given in the days of Moses, tells us:

The secret [things belong] unto the LORD our God: but those [things which are] revealed [belong] unto us and to our children for ever, that [we] may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

This tells us that God chose not to reveal certain "secret things" to people in the days of Moses. WHY? WHAT would some of those "secret things" be? Could it be that that could include something like God the Father saying (in effect): "At this stage you don't need to know that I exist. I have determined that I will reveal My existence to mankind in general when My Son fulfills His earthly ministry"? And so Christ came to reveal, or to make known, the Father, which is what the New Testament tells us, right?

Look at the ten commandments again! Read Exodus 20:1-3! Then check the 40 verses above, that identify the God of Israel. Jesus Christ is the only God Israel knew. They did not NEED to know about the Father's existence. Why should they? If they didn't have the heart to obey the God they knew about, the One who had brought them out of Egypt ...

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! (Deuteronomy 5:29)

... then what would have been the point in making known to them the existence of God the Father? They would just have rejected the Father as well.

8) That is why the fact that there were TWO God-Beings in a very close relationship to each other, which they were in the process of developing into a Family-relationship, is only very, very briefly referred to in the Old Testament.

In Genesis 1:26

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26)

And in Psalm 110:1

A Psalm of David: The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. (Psalm 110:1)

And in Psalm 45:6-7

Thy throne, O God, [is] for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom [is] a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. (Psalm 45:6-7)

And in Daniel 3:25

He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. (Daniel 3:25)

9.) God's revelation to man is always PROGRESSIVE, i.e. God continues to reveal more and more information about a specific subject. That is basic to understanding the Bible. And so it is only in the New Testament that we come to see clearly that God is in the process of building a FAMILY composed of spirit-born sons and daughters, in which Jesus Christ is "the firstborn among many brethren".

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate [to be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household (or Family) of God; (Ephesians 2:19)

10.) Concerning the Jewish understanding about God: they correctly understood that there is ONE God who dealt with them throughout their history and ONE ONLY ... the One who had brought them out of Egypt. This was all that God chose to reveal to them and they were required to have no other "gods" before this God. But, to paraphrase 1 Corinthians 15:27, in that God the Father required Israel to have "no other gods" before Jesus Christ, "...it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him".

Even though they correctly knew they were dealing with only one God, they still misunderstood many Scriptures and misinterpreted them. This includes their misunderstanding of what Deuteronomy 6:4 means. It also includes many other Scriptures. Jesus Christ said as much in Matthew 22:29.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. (Matthew 22:29)

So the JEWISH understanding about the nature of God in the Old Testament is not really important one way or the other! It is evident that they LACKED a great deal of understanding.

I have here presented the true explanation about God in the Old Testament, which is supported by God's Word. It is the understanding that God had revealed to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong and he taught it to God's Church. There are no Scriptures that contradict this understanding. Only the carnal reasoning of the philosophers of old is at odds with this understanding.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:21-22)

Frank W. Nelte