

June 1995

Frank W. Nelte

### 'THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS'

The question has been raised:

"IF Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament, did He resurrect Himself? This question is based on Acts 5:30 which says ...

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. (Acts 5:30)

Let's examine this question more closely.

In the Old Testament the expression "God of your fathers" is used 11 times. Ten times it is "YHWH Elohim ab" and one time it is only "Elohim ab". "Ab" is the Hebrew for "FATHERS".

Thus 10 times we find the expression "YHWH Elohim of your fathers" and once we find the expression "Elohim of your fathers". It is the very first time this expression appears in the Old Testament that it is "the Elohim of your fathers". All ten of the following instances of this expression are "the YHWH Elohim of your fathers".

Notice.

“ And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS (Elohim ab) hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?” (Ex 3:13 AV)

Here Moses was asking Christ what NAME he should tell the people of Israel for the God who had sent him. So Jesus Christ replied:

“ And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, THE LORD GOD OF YOUR FATHERS (YHWH Elohim ab), 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 3:15 AV)

So here Jesus Christ identified Himself as "YHWH Elohim". And that is the expression used in all of the 9 remaining instances of this expression "God of your fathers". And in the Old Testament "YHWH Elohim of your fathers" always refers to Jesus Christ. He is the only member of the God Family who dealt with Israel.

Below are listed all 11 verses with this expression, including the two we have now looked at. You can examine them more closely if you wish.

Exodus 3:13, 15, 16

Deuteronomy 1:11; 4:1

Joshua 18:3

2 Chronicles 13:12; 28:9; 29:5

Ezra 8:28; 10:11.

Without going into details here, a careful examination of these verses shows that they all refer to Jesus Christ, the One who dealt with Israel throughout their history. So let's now look at the New Testament.

### **IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

In the New Testament the expression "God of our (thy, my) fathers" is used 5 times, all of them in the Book of Acts. In four verses it is the Greek expression "o theos ton pateron" ... in Acts 3:13; 5:30; 7:32 and Acts 22:14. In one verse (i.e. Acts 24:14) the Greek expression is "to patroo theo", i.e. "God of (my) fathers".

It is these 5 verses that we'll now examine. So let's start with the first one.

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. (Acts 3:13)

Jesus Christ had just completed His ministry, been crucified, had died, and then been resurrected by God the Father. It was Jesus Christ Himself who had throughout His ministry focussed people's attention on God the Father. The early Church was very aware of this focus. Christ had specifically taught that the Father is greater and that He was going back to the Father (John 16:16; etc.).

So here in Acts 3:13 the expression "the God of our fathers" refers very pointedly to GOD THE FATHER! A statement from Christ Himself in this regard is John 17:5 ...

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. (John 17:5)

Let's also look at Acts 5:30 again.

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS RAISED UP JESUS, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. (Acts 5:30)

This verse is another clear reference to God the Father. When the expression "God of our fathers" is presented in contrast to Jesus Christ, then it obviously refers to God the Father. But when it refers to the individual who actually dealt with Moses and with Israel, then it is a reference to Jesus Christ. This should be clear from Jesus Christ's own statement that ...

"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 AV)

God the Father, while always in overall control, had never actually dealt with any specific individuals in the nation of Israel, or with any specific human being in Old Testament times.

Next is Acts 7:31-32.

When Moses saw [it], he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold [it], THE VOICE OF THE LORD came unto him, (Acts 7:31)

This sets the stage for the statement that follows. Notice that here in this verse Stephen is talking about the One who spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15.

[Saying], I [am] THE GOD OF THY FATHERS, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. (Acts 7:32)

In this verse this expression is a reference to Jesus Christ.

Next we come to Acts 22:14.

And he said, 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. (Acts 22:14)

Here Paul is recounting the time when Ananias spoke to him in Acts 9:17-18. It seems that Ananias was here referring to God the Father.

Let's now see the last verse with this phrase.

But this I confess unto thee, 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: (Acts 24:14)

The verb "worship" here is translated from "latreuo", which comes from "latron", and it really means "whom I serve". The exact same form of this verb is translated "whom I serve" in Acts 27:23; Romans 1:9 and 2 Timothy 1:3. So Paul claimed to SERVE the God of his fathers. Thus the ASV correctly renders this verse as:

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, SO SERVE I THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets;" (Ac 24:14 ASV)

In this context Paul was defending himself before the governor Felix and the One Paul served and worshipped was God the Father, even as we today are to worship God the Father.

Let's summarize what we've seen:

- A) In the O.T. the expression "God of your fathers" is used 11 times and always refers to Jesus Christ;
- B) In the N.T. the expression "the God of our fathers" is used 5 times ... 4 times to refer to God the Father and one time by Stephen to refer to Jesus Christ.

So we see that the same expression sometimes refers to God the Father and at other times it refers to Jesus Christ.

The point is this:

GOD THE FATHER has ALWAYS been the supreme God, over Jesus Christ in authority. It is HIS plan of salvation that was being worked out in O.T. times, even as it is still HIS plan that is being worked out today. The fact that He did not actually HIMSELF DEAL with mankind in O.T. times, does not change the fact that He was and is the God of Israel. The word "Israel" itself means: "as a ruler to have POWER WITH GOD" (see Genesis 32:28) and all power is ultimately vested in God the Father. Christ has always spoken and acted in accordance with the will of the Father, also so in Genesis and in Exodus. So it is certainly correct to refer to God the Father as "the God of our (i.e. Israel's) fathers", even when He was not the One who dealt directly with Israel Himself.

One the other hand, JESUS CHRIST is the One, and the ONLY One, who DEALT DIRECTLY WITH MANKIND in O.T. times. Christ is the only true God that Israel (apart from a very few individuals!) had any knowledge of. The people of Israel in general were ignorant of the Father's existence, though certain individuals seem to have understood that there was another God who was higher in authority than the God who dealt with them.

Thus, for example, we are told that Abraham actually "looked for" the New Jerusalem.

For HE LOOKED FOR A CITY which hath foundations, whose builder and maker [is] God.  
(Hebrews 11:10)

Now IF Abraham understood about the New Jerusalem, as Paul clearly implies in this verse, then that had to be by divine revelation! And if it was by divine revelation, then there is no way that he would have been given a wrong picture of a New Jerusalem WITHOUT GOD THE FATHER IN IT and with only Jesus Christ there!

The New Jerusalem without God the Father in it is meaningless! There simply is no meaning in having the capital of the universe come to this Earth without the Supreme Ruler in it. The capital of an empire is only the capital because that is where the ruler resides. The whole point of the New Jerusalem is that that is where GOD THE FATHER is going to live.

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)

Hebrews 11:10 makes clear that Abraham, the first and foremost of "the fathers", simply MUST have known about the existence of God the Father. And therefore God the Father also MUST have been the God of Abraham ... even though Jesus Christ was the One who continued to deal directly with Abraham and so Christ, too, was the God of Abraham.

Christ was "the Spokesman" for the Father, but never in any way did He take anything away from the Father's glory and power and position and authority!

So, God the Father was the God of Abraham. And Jesus Christ was also the God of Abraham. And Jesus Christ said: "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). And both of them are "the God of Abraham".

Next, Psalm 110:1 shows that David also understood that there are currently TWO members in the God-Family.

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

David referred to the One as "YHVH" and to the other as "ADON". Which of these two did David worship? ... Only "ADON", whom he refers to as "MY Lord"? And not "YHVH"? That does not make sense! Psalm 110:1 shows that David understood that God the Father is over Jesus Christ and David freely acknowledged this in this Psalm. So once again we see: God the Father was the God of David (in this case, instead of Abraham) and Jesus Christ was also the God of David.

Now let's look at another scripture ...

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, [one] like THE SON OF MAN CAME with the clouds of heaven, and came TO THE ANCIENT OF DAYS, and they brought him near before him. (Daniel 7:13)

This is a vision about Jesus Christ appearing before God the Father. Daniel MUST have realized that there are TWO members in God's Family at this time ... just like Abraham and like David must have understood. Would Daniel have worshipped only the One member of that God-Family (Jesus Christ) and ignored the Other (God the Father)? Obviously not!

We have now looked at examples of God's servants spanning about 1500 years of God's dealings with O.T. Israel (i.e. from Abraham via David to Daniel), where these servants had a knowledge of TWO separate God-Beings. The fact that Israel as a whole was unaware of the Father's existence is unimportant here. The Bible shows that A FEW faithful servants of God, including Abraham, the chief of the "fathers", knew of the Father's existence. So the Father was also "their" God.

Like other expressions in the Bible, the term "THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS" can apply to either God the Father or to Jesus Christ. It is not this term itself that makes this distinction clear, but rather THE CONTEXT in which it is used.

The term "YHWH" in the O.T. is mostly used to refer to Jesus Christ ... but occasionally it is used to refer to God the Father (e.g. Psalm 110:1). And why shouldn't it be used for both Beings? After all, they are both "Eternal".

The term "Father" is almost always used to refer to God the Father; yet in Isaiah 9:6 it is Jesus Christ who is called "the everlasting FATHER".

The term "God" in the New Testament (Greek "THEOS") is used predominantly to refer to God the Father and the term "Lord" (Greek "KURIOS") is used to refer to Jesus Christ. This is because where the Hebrew has several different words for "God" (e.g. Elohim, YHWH, Adon, El, Adonai, etc.), the Greek has only one word "THEOS". Whereas the O.T. has only a very, very few references to the TWO different Beings in the Godhead, such references are extremely numerous and common in the N.T.. Thus the writers of the N.T. (under inspiration!) very often simply used the term "THEOS" to refer to the One supreme member of the Godhead, God the Father; and then they used the term "Lord" (i.e. KURIOS) to refer to the second member of the Godhead, Jesus Christ.

They also were very meticulous to focus attention on the Father's position of authority. After all, Christ had said that human beings can have direct access to the Father. And so it should not be surprising that they freely gave credit where credit is due ... by also using the term "the God of our fathers" for God the Father Himself. It is always THE CONTEXT of a scripture that makes clear which member of the God-Family is meant by this term.

