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Is There a Difference Between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament?

Recently I have been confronted with the writings of some who believe that the God of the Old Testament is portrayed as a short-tempered wrathful being, in contrast with Jesus, the gentle, patient, loving Savior of the New Testament. One article which was written by a theology teacher at one of our schools suggested that this apparent discrepancy could be caused by the Israelites' assimilation of the attitudes of their heathen neighbors toward their gods. I would like to submit an alternate view of the subject which I believe to be in harmony with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. The primary goal of this article is to show that Jesus Christ is the main representative of the Godhead that is seen in both the Old and New Testaments.

The most logical place to begin in this study is Genesis 1:1-3:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

The word used here for God is "Elohim," the plural word for God, which would indicate that all three members of the Godhead, including the Holy Spirit, were present and active in the creation of this earth.

So from the very beginning, the entire Godhead has been involved in both creation and redemption. But although they work together for the same purpose, Jesus is seen from Genesis to Revelation as the visible representative of the plan of salvation for humanity. So let's trace His presence throughout the Bible and see that the loving Savior of the New Testament is the same being that we find in the Old Testament as well.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men...."

"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him...."

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth....

"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, [only begotten Son - KJV] who is at the Father's side, has made him known." John 1:1-4; 10, 11; 18.

Notice the truth that is stated here -- no one has ever seen God, except His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This means that every visible appearance of God to men and women throughout the Old Testament was Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state, for no man has ever seen the Father. Also, the words of the Old Testament Scriptures came to the prophets by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speaking the words of the Father through His Son.

"And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were [moved (KJV)] by the Holy Spirit." 2 Pet.1:19-21.

This is why Jesus is called "the Word." John 1:1, 14. He is also the Morning Star that arises in our hearts as we read the writings of the Bible which He Himself inspired. Notice how Jesus connects Himself with both the Old and New Testaments:

I, Jesus,...am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." Rev. 22:16.

Jesus is the Root of David as is prophesied in Isaiah 11:1, 10:

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.... In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious."

Jesus is also the Offspring of David because His earthly life came through Mary, whose lineage was from the tribe of Judah.

These are only a few of the many scriptural evidences that Jesus is the God of both the Old and the New Testaments, representing and speaking in behalf of His Father in the whole plan of salvation. Throughout the Old Testament God appeared to the patriarchs. We know this is Jesus in His pre-incarnate form, because John 1:18 states: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." KJV.

"What speech is to thought, so is Christ to the invisible Father. He is the manifestation of the Father, and is called the Word of God....He made known in His words, His character, His power and majesty, the nature and attributes of God." KH 38.

"Jesus had imparted a knowledge of God to patriarchs, prophets, and apostles.... Through the holy men of old, Christ labored for the salvation of fallen humanity. And when He came to the world it was with the same message of redemption from sin, and restoration to the favor of God." Ibid.

Who were some of the people that the Lord talked with in the Old Testament? First, of course, were Adam and Eve, both in their innocence and also after they sinned in the Garden of Eden. Then it was Cain outside the garden gate as the Lord wrestled with him to keep him from killing his righteous brother, Abel. Years later, Enoch became such a friend of God that He took him home to heaven. Noah heard God's voice so clearly that he preached an unpopular message for 120 years until the flood came and took away every living being except his own family. Abraham was called the friend of God, and communicated with Him regularly.

God walked and talked with Abraham in person, disguised as a man, before the destruction of Sodom:

"When the men [Jesus and two angels appearing as men] got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him....

"The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?... Far be it from you to do such a thing -- to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'... Then he said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?' He answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.' When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home." Gen. 18:16-33.

See the beautiful relationship that the Lord and Abraham had as friends? Doesn't this remind you of the same loving character of Jesus in the New Testament? Even though the Lord was on His way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, we can feel the pathos of His emotions in wanting to share with His friend Abraham what He was about to do. There is no vengeance here, but a deep divine sadness for the lives that would be lost that night.

Another example of the character of Jesus in the Old Testament is found in His relationship with Moses. Jesus was the Divine Being who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and called him to lead the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land. When Moses approached the bush God spoke through the fire and said:

"'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.... So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of the land into a good

and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.... And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." Ex. 3:6-10.

Now begins a lengthy conversation between Moses and God, which it would be well for all to read, for it emphasizes the long-suffering and mercy of God in His dealings with each of us. With unutterable love and patience, He answers all of Moses questions; but in spite of this, Moses finally says:

"O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Ex. 4:13.

Finally, the Bible says, the Lord's anger rose against Moses. But did He display any impatience or anger toward Moses? Here is the calm, gentle answer the Lord gave in response to Moses' reticence to obey:

"Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it.'" Ex. 4:14.

Notice the Lord's carefulness but persistence in winning the cooperation of Moses to be His prophet, and the deliverer of His people! But this was only the beginning of the partnership between Moses and the Lord. It was Jesus who led His people through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan by His presence in the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud.

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." Ex. 30: 21, 22.

"Christ was the leader of the children of Israel in the wilderness wandering. Enshrouded in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, He led and guided them." COL 287.

"The same Jesus who, upon the mount, taught His disciples the far-reaching principles of the law of God, instructed ancient Israel from the cloudy pillar and from the Tabernacle, by the mouth of Moses and Joshua.... Religion in the days of Moses and Joshua was the same as religion today." 2 BC 994.

It was Jesus, along with His Father [1 BC 1103], who spoke the law of the Ten Commandments amidst glory and fire and the sounding of trumpets which so frightened the people that they asked Moses not to have the Lord speak to them anymore [Ex. 20:19].

In Hebrews 12:18-25, Paul reminds us to heed that same voice of Jesus who speaks to us from heaven even now:

"You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded....

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God..... You have come to God, the judge of all men,..to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

"See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?"

So do you see the continuity of the presence, the personality, and the purpose of Jesus throughout both Old and New Testaments? From Genesis to Revelation God has shown Himself to be Emmanuel -- God with us. He was with the three friends of Daniel in the fiery furnace, and He will be with His people through the trials that will assail God's people during the great time of trouble that lies ahead. He came to the aid of Gabriel as he wrestled with the King of Persia when it was time to let God's people go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple [Dan. 10:13]; and He will be our Champion against the enemy when the time comes for us to be delivered from this world and go to the homes He has built for us in the heavenly new Jerusalem.

There are some people who resist the idea that God has a disciplinary side to His character which includes the eventual destruction of those who rebel against Him. There are times when some action must be taken in order to preserve His own people and His government. This too is found in both Old and New Testaments. We must trust God enough to see that sometimes strong action needs to take place in order to preserve and protect His people and His righteous purposes.

God gives people warnings, counsel, and choices. If people choose to listen to His voice and obey, they can avert the consequences. A positive Biblical example of this is the repentance of the Ninevites, who responded to the preaching of Jonah, and repented and were saved. But Pharaoh refused to let God's people go even after the devastation of the ten plagues, and he and the whole country of Egypt suffered as a result of his rebellion.

"God takes no pleasure in the suffering and death of the wicked, but rather desires that all men repent and be saved (Eze. 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), and causes His sun to shine upon the evil and the good (Matt. 5:45). But as the sun affects different materials in different ways, according to their own nature -- it melts wax and hardens clay, for instance -- so the influence of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men produces different effects according to the condition of the heart. The repentant sinner allows God's Spirit to lead him to conversion and salvation, but the impenitent hardens his heart more and more. The very same manifestation of the mercy of God leads in the

case of the one to salvation and life, and in that of the other to judgment and death – to each according to his own choice." 1 BC 516, 17. [Not EGW.]

One thing is for sure – sin and sinners will be destroyed by the time the great controversy ends. Every person on earth who has ever lived will have had a choice as to which side he or she will be on when the curtain comes down. When Jesus was on earth, He displayed the character of God in human flesh. But when He went back to heaven, He assumed once more His equality with His Father. When the Apostle John saw Jesus in vision on the Isle of Patmos, he fell at his feet as though he were dead.

"On the Lord's day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.... I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. and when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like unto the Son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'" Rev. 1:10-18.

Our wonderful Jesus has now resumed the authority of the universe that He possessed from His Father from eternity. After His resurrection He said to His disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Matt. 28:18. He is the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. He has not changed. It is He whose brightness will destroy the wicked at His coming. But it is also He whose benevolent love, mercy and grace will thrill through the heart of every child of God when they see Him face to face as He comes to take us home. On which side will you be on that day? Will you cry for the rocks and the mountains to hide you from the face of the Lord? Or will you be caught up to meet Him with all the saints who have purified their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?

Dear friends, it is up to us which side we will be on when that day comes. Now is the time to make that choice.

"The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: 'Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?' He who walks righteously and speaks what is right,.. who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil – this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him. Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar." Isa. 33:14-17.

"In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them." DA 107.

"Those who have trained the mind to delight in spiritual exercises are the ones who can be translated and not be overwhelmed by the purity and transcendent glory of heaven." IHP 163.

The signs all around us are telling that the end of the world is near. We have only a short time to allow Jesus to finish the good work that He has begun in us.

"I saw a covering that God was drawing over His people to protect them in the time of trouble; and every soul that was decided on the truth and was pure in heart was to be covered with the covering of the Almighty." EW 43.

Beloved, this covering is not a cloak over unconfessed, unrepented of sins in our lives. This covering is the righteousness of Jesus imparted and imputed into our characters until His life and our lives are the same. "Without holiness no one will see the Lord [Heb. 12:14]," and "Holiness is agreement with God [5T. 743]". Our character and the character of Jesus must match exactly in order for us to look up and see Jesus coming without being destroyed. No sin, or disagreement, can be tolerated in those who will be translated. It is up to us to wash our robes of character and make them clean in the blood of the Lamb, which is His perfect life transmitted to us through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May not one of us be missing when the trumpet of the Lord calls His people home.

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