

The Names Jesus Calls God

A Series on the Names of God: Part 3

While triune in nature, Jesus appears to use names for God to inform and teach the audience something about the regal majesty of God.

God (Theos)

In the New Testament, “theos” is the most frequent designation for God. The Greek noun places an emphasis on God being the One and only true God. This particular emphasis is more apparent when Jesus is speaking to a counterfeit god like Satan.

But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (**theos**).’” (Matt 4:4)

Here Jesus points out the inadequacy of Satan the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4).

Lord (Kyrios)

When Jesus uses “kyrios” with the Shema (the phrase “Hear O Israel”), it is especially significant to the Jews, because it connects the Old Testament (covenant) with the New (covenant). The God whom the Christians worship is the same God as the Patriarchs, the same God of the Exodus and the same God of Israel.

Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord (**kyrios**) our God (theos) is one Lord (**kyrios**); and you shall love the Lord (**kyrios**) your God (theos) with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ (Mark 12:29-30; Matt 22:36-37; Luke 10:26-27)

Great King (Megas Basileus)

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of avoiding oaths, even swearing by the city Jerusalem, because it is the city of the acclaimed (i.e. great in quality, honor, power, glory) King.

“Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord (kyrios).’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God (theos), or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great (**megas**) King (**basileus**).” (Matt 5:33-35)

Lord of Heaven and Earth (Kyrios Ouranos Ge)

In His condemnation of three Galilean cities, who did not repent despite witnessing His most significant miracles, Jesus praises God, Lord of the heavenly expanse, for His plan of revealing Himself to those who did not have preconceived notions that would prevent them from recognizing the reality of God through Jesus.

At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord (**kyrios**) of heaven (**ouranos**) and earth (**gē**), that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. (Matt 11:25)

God of the Living (Theos Zao)

Jesus makes clear to the Sadducees that there is a future life with the resurrection; when a Believer dies, he continues to exist. God is the God of the living.

But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God (theos): I am the God (theos) of Abraham, and the God (theos) of Isaac, and the God (theos) of Jacob? He is not the God (**theos**) of the dead but of the living (**zao**).” (Matt 22:31-32)

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Most High (Hypsistos)

In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus presents Christian behavior, that might be perceived socially as weak, as being worthy of a son of the mighty God who is powerful in action. The implication is that genuine love is magnanimous.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High (**hypsistos**); for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. (Luke 6:35)

When communicating personally to God, Jesus uses names for God that reflect the intimacy of their divine relationship.

Abba (Father)

The Aramaic term “abba” was originally derived from baby language as in “daddy.” Over time it replaced the older form “ābī” (for “father”) and gained a wider meaning of “my father” and “the father.” Eventually, the term “abba” was used by adult sons and daughters to express the warm feeling of “dear father.” When comparing the Synoptic accounts, one gains a better sense of Jesus’ endearment.

And He was saying, “Abba (**abba**)! Father (**patēr**)! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” (Mark 14:36)

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father (**patēr**), if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt 26:39)

He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, “My Father (**patēr**), if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.” (Matt 26:42)

And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, “Father (**patēr**), if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” (Luke 22:41-42)

Jesus always addressed God in His prayers using “Father” with the sense of a loving son speaking to his father (Matt 11:25 [Luke 10:21], Luke 23:34, 46; John 11:41; 12:27; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24).

Just as Jesus enjoys the fatherhood of God, so do others who have a genuine and intimate relationship with Jesus. Jesus’ Father is also your Father. Jesus indicates that the disciple’s experience of God’s fatherly love places him under a special obligation in the way he conducts himself with his fellow man. A disciple of Jesus is to be holy as God is holy (Matt 5:48).

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of **your Father** who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt 5:44-45)

So do not be like them; for **your Father** knows what you need before you ask Him. (Matt 6:8)

For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for **your heavenly Father** knows that you need all these things. (Matt 6:32)

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will **your Father** who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Matt 7:11)

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Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that **your Father** who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. (Mark 11:25)

Be merciful, just as **your Father** is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

Do not be afraid, little flock, for **your Father** has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

My God (Eli)

The Hebrew noun “el” has the generic meaning of god; however, Jesus uses this term in the context of the One and only God. The long “i” ending grammatically indicates the first person possessive which translates Jesus’ cry on the cross “eli”, “My God.”

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli (**ēli**), Eli (**ēli**), lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God (**theos**), My God (**theos**), why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:45-46; Mark 15:34)

It is at this moment that Jesus has taken the place of human beings and in the process of sacrificing His life to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. In contrast to “abba Father,” Jesus’ cry “My God” acknowledges the majesty and sovereignty of the Holy God.

References:

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