

Chapter 6: Other disciples' references to Jesus as God

1- *Your Throne, O God*⁸²:

In Hebrews 1:8-12 we read “But to the Son *He says*: "Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your Kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." ¹⁰ And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; ¹² Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail”

The Background of Heb. 1:8

In Hebrews chapter 1 and 2, the author of Hebrews is describing how Jesus as the Son of God is better than angels. In his support for that he quoted 2 scriptures from the Old Testament and applied them to the Lord Jesus Christ. The first was from Psalm 45:6-7 which he quoted in Heb. 1:8, 9. The second scripture was from Psalm 102: 25-27 which he quoted in Heb.1:10-12.

Now let us move along to Hebrews 1:8-9. The question is if in Hebrews 1:8 Jesus was addressed as “God” or not and if he was addressed as “God” was that in a figurative way or in a literal way.

⁸² Harris; 188-227

Hebrews 1:8-9 reads “But of the Son *He says*, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.

⁹ "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS”

And in Greek “πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱόν· ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου. ἠγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν· διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέν σε ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεός σου ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιᾶσεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου”

“ὁ θεός” In Hebrews 1:8:

1. “ὁ θεός” as a nominative:

If “ὁ θεός” is nominative, it may either be a subject “God is your throne” or predicate “Your throne is God”. And although the word order and the parallel structure (subject-predicate) with v 8b is in favor of the latter translation, yet almost all proponents of the view that “ὁ θεός” is a nominative prefer the former translation. This view is supported on three grounds:

A- Old Testament parallels

Though “God is your throne is not found anywhere else; yet it is not strange to scriptures like “Be thou to be a rock of habitation...thou art my rock and my fortress” Ps.71:3.

A distinction should be made, however, between God as a person’s rock and God as person’s throne. As a rock God provides secure protection, but the concepts of “God” and “throne” are too dissimilar to permit a comparable metaphor. Unlike these other

affirmations, “God is your throne” is elliptical for “God is your stronghold” means “God protects you” but “God is your throne” doesn’t mean “God rules over you” it would rather mean “God is the foundation of your throne” in the same way “Your throne is God” means “your throne is founded on God” for the word “throne” can’t belong to the category of divine. Yet as we have seen in our study of Psalm 45 that it is hard to see the notation of “founded by God” in one word “God”.

B- Syntactical and Semantic Considerations:

a. If “ὁ θεός” is vocative, “αὐτοῦ” in v 8b is left without antecedent⁸³.

If v 8 is to be ended with “αὐτοῦ” yet the addition of the word “and” “καὶ” By the author of Hebrews to the LXX text

“ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος,

καὶ

ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου”

makes it no difficult to move from the 2nd person “σου” to the third person “αὐτοῦ”;

therefore the antecedent of “αὐτοῦ” in v 8b could be the Son who is addressed as “O God”

b. In v 7 we read “καὶ πρὸς ... τοὺς ἀγγέλους λέγει...” which is translated “but about the angels says...” therefore v 8 should carry the same sense and “πρὸς ... τὸν υἱόν” should be translated “but of the Son” (NAS) rather than “but to the Son” (NKJ) therefore “ὁ θεός” would be nominative rather than vocative “but of the Son ‘God is your throne’”

⁸³ There is some textual variation regarding v 8, the two readings are “ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου” or “ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ” which is “a specter of righteousness in the specter of your kingdom” or “a specter of righteousness is the specter of his kingdom” and in this argument the second reading is assumed to be the right reading. For more detailed argument for this textual variation read Harris; 210-211

- There is a contrast between v 7 and v 8 using “μὲν...δὲ” “On one hand he says about the angels...on the other hand he says of (to) the Son” this contrast may explain the change from “about the angels” to “to the Son”

- In v 13 “πρὸς ... εἰρηκέιν” clearly means “has said to...” therefore “πρὸς” in v 8 may indicate a transaction from “say about” to “say to” especially because v 10 has to be understood as “to the Son he says” before the unambiguous vocative “σὺ ... κύριε,”
Anyhow; it wouldn't be improper to translate v 8 as “but with respect to the Son ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’”

C- Context:

The first argument is that the author of Hebrews in v 7-8 is not comparing the changing nature of angels with the divine nature of the Son but rather he is comparing the function of angels that is their transient service with the function of the Son that is his eternal kingship.

Harris argues back that function can't be separated from nature. The mutability of angel's functions as the servants of God shows their dependency on God. So also the eternity of Christ's reign implies the immutability of his person. There for ascribing the title “ὁ θεός” to Christ to denote his deity can't be inappropriate.

The second argument is that if the Father is addressing the Son as “God” in v 8, that would be the climax of the argument and any further discussion will weakening the case.

Yet Harris argues back that v4 “having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they” is the central theme of chapters 1 and 2. The verses that follow v 4 are an explanation of the superiority of the Son over the angels.

The description of the Son as “God” in v 8 is could then be essential because this apply to Jesus the divine title implied in v 3 “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature”. Certainly also addressing the Son as “you...lord” in v 10 can’t be anticlimactic for the title “κύριε” is no less elevated than “ὁ θεός” for v10-12 is quoted from Psalm 102:25-27 originally applied to YHWH and also v 6 “Let all the angels of God worship Him” is quoted from Psalm 97:7 originally applied to YHWH. So the argument of v10-12 that Jesus is creator strengthens the writer’s argument and doesn’t weaken it.

2. “ὁ θεός” as a vocative:

Harris pointed out some reasons that support the translation of “ὁ θεός” as vocative:

1- Psalm 45:7 (LXX 44:7)

The translation of “אלהים” in Psalm 45:7 as vocative “O God” remains the most satisfactory solution to the exegetical problems posed by the verse.

In the LXX it is even more probable that “ὁ θεός” is vocative for the king is addressed as “mighty warrior” in v 4 and 6 though there is no corresponding “גבור” in v 6 in the Hebrew, which affirm the vocative “ὁ θεός” in the LXX from which the author of Hebrew quoted v 8.

2- Word order

If “God” was a subject nominative “God is your throne” one would have expected the word order to be “ὁ θεός ὁ θρόνος σου...” to avoid any ambiguity of the subject.

If “God” was a predicate nominative “your throne is God” one would have expected “ὁ θρόνος σου θεός...” or “ὁ θρόνος σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος θεός” like Heb.3:4 “ὁ δὲ πάντα κατασκευάσας θεός” “the builder of all things is God”

On the other hand a vocative “ὁ θεός” after “σου” seems to be natural.

3- The meaning of “λέγειν πρὸς”:

“λέγειν πρὸς” was mentioned 35 times in the NT. Apart from Heb.1:8a, it was used only 2 times (Rom.10:21, Heb.1:7) to mean “say about” and used elsewhere to mean “say to” or “say against”. If the parallelism between v 7a and 8a suggests that “λέγειν πρὸς” means “say about”, Harris argued that the prominent NT usage of “λέγειν πρὸς” points equally strongly to the opposite way, that is “say to” rather than “say about”

Moreover The second person addressed in in verse 10a is found after an implied “πρὸς τὸν υἱόν λέγει” “to the Son he says” implied from v 7a and 8a.

From these reasons and others Harris concludes that “ὁ θεός” of Heb.1:8 is vocative rather than nominative and the author of Hebrews in his argument for the superiority of the Son over the angels points out that whereas the angels are addressed *by* God, the Son may be addressed *as* God.

The question that now comes to mind is that: if “ὁ θεός” of Hebrews 1:8 is vocative, why should we apply it to the Son in a literal form especially because Heb.1:8 is quoted from Psalm 45 where an earthly king is called “ὁ θεός”. In other words the if psalmist applied “ὁ θεός” to the king without elevating him to the rank of divinity, then in the same way the author of Hebrews applied “ὁ θεός” to the Son yet that should not elevate him to the rank of divinity.

Harris points out how the author of Hebrews believes in the full deity of the Son:

1- Jesus is the exact representation of God’s nature and glory 1:3

- 2- He not only existed before his incarnation 10:5, before Melchizedek 7:3, before human history 1:2, or before the creation of the universe 1:10, but he also existed eternally 7:16; 9:14; 13:8
- 3- He is called “Lord” 1:10; 2:3; 7:14; 13:20 like the Father 7:21; 8:8, 11; 10:16, 30
- 4- He is creator 1:10, sustainer 1:3; and heir of the whole universe 1:2, he is worshiped by angels 1:6, and he is the object of human faith 12:2; he is sovereign over the world to come 2:5
- 5- Passages referring to YHWH in the OT is applied to Jesus:
 - 1:6 is quoted either from Deut. 32:43 LXX or Ps.97:7 yet both scriptures refer to YHWH
 - 1:10-12 is quoted from Psalm 101:26-28 LXX (Psalm 102:25-27)
 - 3:14-15 is quoted from Psalm 95:7-8

Therefore Harris concludes that the appellation “ὁ θεός” that was figurative and hyperbolic when applied to a mortal king was applied to the immortal Son in a literal and true sense.

Yet, as Harris also points out, the belief of the author of Hebrews in the full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ goes hand in hand with his belief in the subordination of the Son to the Father and the full humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The subordination of the Son could be seen in:

- 1- “Therefore God, your God ...” the God who addresses his Son as “God” is also the God of his Son.
- 2- The Father is the one who anointed his Son with the “oil of gladness” v 9
- 3- The Father is the one who gave the Son to sit on his right hand v 13

- 4- The Son was dependant on the Father for his appointment as heir of the universe (1:2) and to the office of the High priest (1:6) for the preparation of his body (10:5) for his resurrection (13:20) and for his exaltation to the Father's right hand (1:13)

The Full deity of the Lord Jesus didn't deny by any means his full humanity as it could be seen in:

- 1- Jesus had the human nature with all its weakness and limitation (2:11, 14, 17)
- 2- Apart from sin (4:15; 7:26), he belonged to the tribe of Judah (7:14) he experienced human emotions (5:7) temptation (4:15) suffering (5:8) and death (2:9)
- 3- He believed and feared God (2:13) and offered prayers to Him (5:7) he exhibited Human virtues such as fidelity (2:17, 3:2) and obedience (10:7) and gave teaching while on earth (2:3) and endured hostility from the sinners (12:3) .

From this overview of the whole epistle of Hebrews we can see that the eternal Son of God is equal with the Father in his nature and in his essence yet he is functionally subordinate to him. And during his incarnation his full humanity did not take from nor put down his deity.

2- *Our God and Savior Jesus Christ*⁸⁴:

2 Pet. 1:1 reads “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” NKJV, NIV, NASV and others

The KJV reads “through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ”

The Greek reads “Συμεὼν Πέτρος δοῦλος καὶ ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῖς ἰσότημον ἡμῖν λαχοῦσιν πίστιν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”

The question is that if the phrase “our God and savior” of 2 Pet.1:1 refers to two different persons “our God” who is the Father and “the savior” who is Jesus Christ. or this phrase refers to one person “our God and savior” who is Jesus Christ.

D- Arguments for the reference to two persons:

1- The Position of “our” “ἡμῶν”

It is argued that the position of the pronoun “our” after “God” distinguishes “God” from “savior”. Two parallel passage to illustrate the point:

Tit.2:13	τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ	καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν	Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
2 Thess.1: 12	τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου		Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
2 Pet. 1:1	τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος		Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

⁸⁴ Harris; 230-238

If “our” binds “God” and “savior” together in Tit.2:13 “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” then it separates “God” from its coordinated subject in the second and the third cases “our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” 2 Thess.1:12 and “our God and the Savior” 2 Pet.1:2

This argument is faulty for because:

A- When two subjects are connected by a single article, a personal pronoun applies to both whether the pronoun proceeds both as 2 Pet.1: 10 “your call and election” “ὑμῶν τὴν κλήσιν καὶ ἐκλογήν” or follows either of the subjects as in Eph. 3:5 “τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις” “his holy apostles and prophets” or as 1 Thess.3:7 “πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν” “all our afflictions and distress”

B- In the epistle of second peter alone we read three times “τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” “our lord and savior Jesus Christ”1:11; 2:20; 3:18. The personal pronoun follows the first subject “the lord” and these three examples are exactly resembling 2 Pet.1:1 yet there is no question that “our lord” is the same who is “our savior” whose name is “Jesus Christ”

C- In 2 Pet.1:1 The pronoun would be limited to “God” only if the word “savior” was auricular.

2- The Parallel construction in 2 Pet. 1:2

2 Pet.1:1 “ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”

2 Pet. 1:2 “ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν”

v2 clearly distinguish between God and Christ. It would seem to be natural to explain v 1 on that ground for there is no reason for the identity in v1 and the distinction in v 2.

Though there are a lot of similarities between 2 Pet.1:1 and 1:2 yet there are two major differences:

- a. "God and Savior" is a stereotyped formula that was used by the Jews to refer to YHWH, the one true God and was used also by the Gentiles to refer to one god or a defined ruler, but "God and Jesus" is not a stereotyped formula.
- b. "Savior" of 1:1 is a title but "Jesus" of 1:2 is a proper name. We can easily speak of "our God and savior, Jesus Christ" but it is hard to speak of "God and Jesus, our lord"

3- Deviation from a stereotyped formula:

The final argument for understanding 2 Pet.1:1 as a reference to two different persons is that "our God and savior" is a deviation from the stereotype formula of "our lord and savior" found in 1:11; 2:20; 3:2 and 3:18 therefore 2 Pet.1:1 should refer to two different persons.

But one can argue that "θεὸς" of a replacement of the more common "κύριος" yet the reference is one in all the scripture of 2 Peter. In the same way we can say that the "day of the lord" of 2 Pet.3:10 is nothing but the "day of God" 2 Pet.3:12.

E- Arguments for the reference to one person in 2 Pet.1:1

3- The anarthrous "savior"

As in Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1 is an example that when two coordinate nouns refer to the same noun are customarily linked by a single article. If Peter wanted undoubtedly to refer to two different persons, he would have added an article to the anarthrous "savior". One can hardly agree that 1 Pet.1:3 "ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ" "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is a reference to one person God the Father, yet 2 Pet. 1:1 is a reference to two persons though they grammatically identical.

4- The stereotyped formula "God and savior"

In the first century the idea of “God-Savior” was so common in the Mediterranean area. It was used either by the Jews to refer to YHWH or by the gentiles to refer to one identity.

It will be no surprise if Paul applied Isaiah 45:23 christologically to Christ in Philippians 2:10-11, that Peter applied from the same passage Isaiah 45:21 about YHWH who is “a righteous God and Savior” to Christ in 2 Pet.1:1.

5- The use of “savior” in 2 Peter

The word “savior” was mentioned 5 times in 2 Peter

- 1:1 “τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”
- 1:11 “τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”
- 2:20 “τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”
- 3:2 “τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτήρος”
- 3:18 “τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”

These observations could be made regarding the word “savior”:

- 1- It is always anarthrous and refers to Jesus Christ never the Father.
- 2- It never stands alone. It is always preceded by an articulated noun either “lord” 4 times or “God” one time
- 3- “our lord and savior” combination in 2 Peter always refers to one person, Jesus Christ.

Therefore the usage of the word “savior” in 2 Peter strongly suggests that 2 Pet.1:1 refers to one person, Jesus Christ.

6- The doxology to Christ in 2 Peter 3:18

Peter closed his epistle saying “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen” 3:18. It wouldn’t be difficult to imagine that Peter who ended his epistle ascribing glory to Jesus forever and forever, started his epistle describing Jesus as “our God and Savior”

One can conclude then that “our God and Savior” of 2 Pet.1:1 refers to one person who is “Jesus Christ”

The usage of “θεός” in the NT and its application to the Lord Jesus:

Harris in his book “Jesus as God” wrote about the NT writer use of the word God in their writings, He wrote⁸⁵:

The Word “θεός” was used 1315 times in the NT. There is a limitation of applying the word “θεός” to Jesus in the NT. 7 times out of 1315 (those are according to his research John 1:1; 1:18; 20:28; Rom.9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1). The word in General refers to the Father and it is His proper name yet when it was applied to Jesus it remains a descriptive title. Jesus was called “the son of God” “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ” where The Father is God, we never read that the Father is “ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ θεοῦ” “the Father of God” where the Son, Jesus, is God. Also; in the binitarian and the Trinitarian only the scripture is 1 Cor. 1:3 “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, not the Son nor the Holy Spirit is called “God”. An example for the binitarian Christ” an example of a Trinitarian scripture will be 2 Cor. 13:14 “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”

Here are some of the reasons that Harris offered for the infrequency of the application of the word “θεός” to Jesus:

- 1- The word “θεός” generally signifies the Father. When we find the expression “God the Father” we conclude that “God is the Father” and since “the Father” is a person, so the identity between “God” and “the Father” as proper names referring to persons must be numerical. If Jesus were to called every where “God” then

⁸⁵ Ibid; 269-299

- the word “θεός” will be his proper name like “Jesus” and not his title and, many linguistic ambiguity would be present everywhere.
- 2- To protect the personal distinction between the Father and the Son. This distinction was observed all over the NT where the Father is called “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ” Eph.1:17; or “his God and Father” Rev 1:6; and in an address to Jesus reference is made to “your God” Heb. 1:9; and Jesus himself called the Father “my God” Matt.27:46.
 - 3- To show the subordination of the Son to the Father. By customarily reserving the term “θεός” for the Father, The NT authors highlighted the fact that while the Father is not subordinate to the Son, The Son is subordinate to the Father. Yet the subordination of the Son doesn’t imply inferiority as we will discuss later.
 - 4- To safeguard the Humanity of our lord Jesus Christ. If Jesus was said to be God in as much as it is said about the Father, the humanity of our lord would be more subjected to denial.
 - 5- The relative infrequent usage of “θεός” for Jesus corresponds to the relatively infrequent use of ontological categories of the NT Christology which is functional in emphasis.

Harris Suggests two main significance of the usage of “theos” GR for Jesus:

- 1- The application of “θεός” to Jesus is mainly Ontological in character that is Jesus, in his being and nature, is God:
 Jesus is not God-in-action or God-in-revelation but rather that he is God-by-nature. That is the best translation of John 1:1; 1:18; 20:28 as we have seen. Also; the author of Hebrews when he called the Son “O God” 1:8 referred to his nature

as “the very stamp of God’s nature” 1:3. Peter, also, who called Jesus “our God and Savior” 2 Pet. 1:1 wrote after that about the believer’s future participation in the “divine nature” 2 Pet. 1:4

2- The application of “θεός” to Jesus affirms his deity:

Though the Jesus’ equality with the Father and His deity can be proved apart from the application of the term “θεός” to him, yet the application of the term “θεός” to the lord Jesus affirm beyond the shadow of any doubt his deity. Applying the term “θεός” to Jesus affirms that There is a numerical unity of essence between the Father and the Son but not a numerical identity of person.

Harris pointed out that:

The term “θεός” was applied to Jesus as early as his resurrection⁸⁶:

John 20: 28 ----- 30-33 AC

Rom. 9:5 ----- 57

Titus 2:13 ----- 63

2 Pet. 1:1 ----- 65

Heb. 1:8 ----- 60s

John 1:1; 1:18 ----- 90s

In the Gospel of John we see that the term “θεός” was applied to the lord Jesus⁸⁷:

Before His incarnation ----- John 1:1

During his incarnation ----- John 1:18

After his incarnation ----- John 20:28

⁸⁶ Ibid, 278

⁸⁷ Ibid, 285