

How Can a Man Become God?

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Sometimes humor can best illustrate a biblical misunderstanding. An Irish man talking with his Jewish friend: "Saul did you hear the great news? My son Patty has become a priest!" "Nu, so what's the big deal about that, John?" Saul asked. "It's a very big deal, Saul. As a priest he can one day become a Bishop!" John responded.

"So what's the big deal about that?" Saul again asked.

"Saul, as Bishop, Patty can one day become a Cardinal.

Imagine my son the Cardinal!" John was getting excited now.

"Nu", Saul repeated, "but what's the big deal about that,

John?" John sputtered out, "Saul, my friend, as Cardinal, Patty can be . . . Oh, be still my heart...he can become Pope!!" And Saul again asks, "So nu, what's the big deal about that, John?" Now impatient, John demands, "So what do you expect, for him to become God!" Almost triumphantly, Saul says, "And why not, one of our boys made it!"

The mistaken notion is this: that Yeshua (the Jewish way of saying Jesus), as a man, became God. This is not the message of the Scriptures. The scriptures are quite clear on this point: "no man can become God!" But on the other hand, "nothing is impossible for God!" (Genesis 18:14; Luke 1:37). What the Jewish Scriptures prophesied and the New Covenant declares is that in Yeshua, God (Adonai) became a man, i.e., God came 'in the flesh'. Three questions normally raised on this issue help us consider it more fully.

Can God Come in the Flesh? To find this answer let's visit Abraham in Genesis 18. In Genesis 18: 1, the text states "God appeared to Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre." In the next verse it states, "as he lifted his eyes, three men stood by him". Abraham and Sarah then prepared food for these "guests"(18:3-8). Was it merely a vision? Impossible, for not only do you not prepare food for a vision, but also visions don't eat, and these men did ("and they ate", 18:8).

Now two of these three "men" are later identified as angels (compare Genesis 18:22 and 19:1). But the third one that ate (v.8), spoke (v.10) and walked (v.16, 22) with Abraham is identified as the LORD, Himself. In 18:13, the text states "And the LORD said to Abraham . . ." The word translated "LORD" throughout this portion is the Tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters that make up the sacred Name of God: yood, hey, vav, hey, (pronounced by some as Yahweh, or Jehovah).

Do the Jewish Scriptures teach that God came in the flesh? Clearly the answer is "yes!" But, biblically, was Messiah expected to be God incarnate? The prophets, especially Isaiah and Micah, most directly answer this. "For a child shall be born to us and a son shall be given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6-v.5 in the Hebrew

text).

This portion is traditionally* recognized as "Messianic:" "'I have yet to raise up the Messiah,' of whom it is written, for a child is born to us" (Isaiah 9:5). Isaiah predicts that one coming from the "Galilee" (9:1) will bring "light," "joy" (9:2-3) and "victorious peace" (9:4-5) because He is the Prince of Peace (Sar Shalom), indeed the Mighty God (El Gibbor). This "child to be born" is the theme of Isaiah 7:12 where here it states He would be "born of a virgin" (7:14), He is "the root of David" that Gentiles will trust in (11:10) as well the remnant of Israel (10:20-23). The truth of who this One will be is reiterated when it says that not every Jewish person will believe, but only "the remnant shall return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God [El Gibbor, again]" (10: 21).

Micah the prophet not only gives further detail about His Divine Nature, but also specifically where He would be born. "But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, little among the thousands of Judah, out of you will go forth for Me, one who will be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from days of eternity" (Micah 5:2-v.1 in the Hebrew text). Micah clearly states Israel's Ruler would not only be "born" in Bethlehem, but his "goings forth" would be from eternity (olam). That is, He who would be born in Bethlehem is God, the Eternal One!

Thus the Messiah, the One to bring peace, joy and life to all who would believe (the remnant), the One who would be born in Bethlehem, yet live in Galilee, this One is the Lord, the Mighty God Himself! But does the New Covenant proclaim Yeshua as Messiah and God? The word "Christ" is a transliteration, not a translation. It should be translated "Messiah" (Anointed One), from the Greek, "Christos". Thus, "Christ" is not Yeshua's last name, but His title, Messiah. Hundred's of times the New Covenant unequivocally declares Yeshua to be the Messiah. Similarly His Deity is declared hundred's of times as well by His title Lord and His identification as the LORD of the Older Covenant (Mark1: 1-3; Hebrews1: 8-12; etc.). The New Covenant writers were clear regarding His Divine nature: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:1, 14).

Mostly, Yeshua's Divinity was assumed, and written about in order to make an application for our lives: "Each of you should not look merely to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as Messiah's. Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but humbled Himself, taking on the form of a servant, coming in human appearance. In that form of a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient until death, even death by the cross" (Philippians 2:4-8).

What amazing love is demonstrated in the humility of our Messiah! The One who is the Eternal God, Adonai, came in the flesh to die for our sins that we might have forgiveness, life, joy and peace by trusting in His atoning sacrifice for our sins. No man can become God. But God incarnates His Life and Love through Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel, and Savior of the World.

*Midrash Rabbah on Deuteronomy (Debarim), p. 22