

THE TITLES ADON AND ADONAI

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have been studying the Names and Titles of God for some time, each name and each title presents a different aspect of the God we read of in the Bible. An interesting aspect of this may be found in Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 17 which contains no less than nine titles: “For the LORD (Yahweh) your God (Elohim) is God (Elohei) of gods (Elohim), and Lord (Adonai) of lords, a great God (Gadol—distinguished—El), a mighty (Gibbor), and a terrible (Yareh, to be held in reverence), who regards not persons, nor taketh reward.” The word Adon is the basic form and the plural form Adonim and Adonai all occur in the Bible. This Hebrew word comes from a root meaning to rule, it is translated in several ways in the KJV, firm, master, lord, Lord, king, husband, owner, governor and several others. In its basic form “Adon” appears only **13 times** in the Hebrew Bible (13 times in 13 verses; 2 times in Genesis; 5 times in Isaiah, 2 times in Jeremiah; 1 time in Malachi; 3 times in Psalms). God’s people, as a body, address Him as Adonim in Nehemiah 8:10. Likewise, the Psalmist, in Psalm 8:1, on behalf of Israel, addresses Jehovah as Adonim according to His full glory known to all the earth. Additionally, He is “Lord (Adonim) of lords” in both Deuteronomy 10:17 and in Psalm 136:3. However, Jehovah is “Lord (adon) of all the earth” in Joshua 3:11 and 3:13. However, in all of these references to God, not once is He called Adonai. Apparently the plural form is sometimes intensive, For instance, although Joseph had concealed his true identity, his brothers understood his position of authority in Egypt. Joseph was the supreme lord and ruler of all of Egypt. Hence, his brothers used the plural intensive, adonim, to describe him. Pharaoh, of course, was above Joseph as lord in Egypt; however, Pharaoh had conferred his complete authority on Joseph. The representative of Pharaoh, then, was also known as adonim, the supreme lord, of Egypt. Similarly, in Gen 39:20, with the occurrence of adonim, in reference to Potiphar, the Egyptian who bought Joseph as a slave. This plural form for lord indicates a master who has the power of life or of death over his servant, a master who has legal ownership of his servant. It is important to note that in Genesis 43:20; 44:5, 7-9, 18 -20 and 22, when Joseph’s brothers speak to him directly, they refer to him as adon, (singular). They are not addressing him according to his full authority, but according to his immediate authority over them.

The translation of ADON is one of the few titles of God to have been rendered correctly. But there have been some difficulties with what is known as the Masoretic text. These were Jews anxious to preserve the text of the Old Testament scriptures. When the Jews dispersed into many countries, they integrated into the local cultures and used local languages. Over the course of a few centuries, Hebrew became an extinct language. Hebrew was, of course, the language the Hebrew Bible was written in, so it was still studied by scholars and scribes. The early Masoretes were determined to make accurate copies of the Hebrew Bible and went to elaborate lengths to ensure mistakes are not made. As part of their efforts to preserve and accurately transmit the text, the Masoretes offered notations at the end of each book that provided critical information to ensure an accurate transmission. This included information such as the number of verses, words, and letters in a given book. Many books include information regarding what word appears at the midpoint of the text. The later Masoretes made an even more important contribution to the text which had been handed down carefully for over a millennia. Originally Hebrew was written without vowels, and over time the proper pronunciation of many words was forgotten. The Masoretes did not change the consonants, but added vowel dots, or niqqud, above or below the consonants to indicate the pronunciation of words. Several styles of vocalizations were created, but the one which became the standard is known as Tiberian Hebrew. One fault the Masoretes might be charged with is that in 134 places in the Old Testament the original Hebrew word 'Yahweh' was altered to read 'Adonai.'

There is one important scripture where the Hebrew word Adon is used, It is to be found in Psalm 110v.1-6, where King David wrote under the inspiration of God "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, you are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at your right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries." The Lord Jesus came into collision with the scribes and Pharisees who accused him of blasphemy. The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, make yourself God. Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture

cannot be broken; Do you say of him, whom the Father has sanctified, and sent into the world, You blaspheme; because I said, I am the Son of God? (Joh 10:33-36)

In Matthew 21 Jesus came to Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass”. (Mat 21:5) The people rejoiced and cheered him on with the cry, Hosanna to the son of David. He came into Jerusalem and then entering the Temple, he threw out the salesmen and money changers and cleansed the Temple. Subsequently Jesus stayed in Jerusalem addressing the people and the scribes and Sadducees, a largely secular group in their practice of religion who denied the idea of resurrection from the grave after death and any notion of an afterlife, believing this life is all there is. The Sadducees also denied the existence of angels or spirit. These attempted to fault Jesus in his answers about paying tribute, and his teaching about the resurrection of the dead. But the Lord Jesus patiently explained to them how they were in error because they did not know the teaching of the scriptures, nor did they understand the power of God. He explained further how “in the resurrection people neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Mat 22:29-32) In this way the Sadducees were silenced, to the approval of the Pharisees. Then one of their lawyers asked him what was the great commandment in the law, and the answer he gave could not be faulted. But then Jesus decided to question them and he asked them, “What think ye of the Christ?” Whose son is he? They did not answer “He is the Son of God:” to have done so would have been to admit that he would be equal with God, which they considered blasphemy. They, therefore, adhered to the fleshly view of the matter, and replied, “He is the Son of David.” This was equivalent to saying that he was equal with David only; and consequently, not one with God. But this position was pregnable, and easily turned. Jesus saw their weakness, and skilfully exposed it by inquiring, “How then does David in spirit call him *Adon* (Lord superior, ruler, &c.), saying, *Yahweh* said unto my *Adon*, sit thou at my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David, then, call him *Adon*, (Adoni = my Lord) how is he his son?” They could not answer this; no man, says Matthew, was able to answer him a word (chap. 23:41). The point in this argument is a question of equality; and therefore of a Divine, or merely human descent. If Messiah was simply a son of David, then he would be equal in natural descent, and inferior in rank. If equal in natural descent, he would have been no more than a son of Jesse; and if simply David’s son, he would have been socially

inferior, inasmuch as in society, and especially in Hebrew society, fathers take precedence of sons. This being admitted as contained in their pre-mises, upon what known principle could David speak of such a Messiah as his *Adon* or Sovereign Lord? Here is a particularly weak point in the Jewish understanding of the doctrine concerning the Messiah. As in the days of their fathers, so it is now, “they judge after the flesh.” They can only see in their Messiah a son of David, having ‘no higher origin than blood, or the impulse of the flesh, or the will of man, they have no conception of a Messiah who should be formed by the Eternal Spirit from the substance descended from David, as Adam was formed by the same spirit from the dust; and therefore generated by the will and power of Ail, still less did they see that such a Son of Power should become a son by a spirit re-generation from among the dead.’ (J.T. *Phanerosis*).

“Thy people, Adon, (correctly rendered Lord or *κυριος* in the Greek) shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psa. 110:3). (The period when David’s son returns from heaven in power and great glory) and David addresses him as Adon, translated into English as Lord. The scattered Jews or diaspora are brought from all the countries of the world “with a mighty hand and with a stretched-out arm” to a place selected by the Lord Jesus Christ in the vicinity of the territory promised to Abraham and described in Ezekiel as the “wilderness of the People”. (20:35) While Adon is singular, *Elohim*, *Shaddai*, and *Adonai*, are plural names of the Almighty, and require corresponding terms of expression.

Now of this son, Yahweh declared, ‘I will be his father, and he shall be my son;’ (2 Sam.7:14; 1Chron.17:13; 1 Chron.28:6) so that this son of David was to be both son of David and son of God. He was to be the son **in a sense in which no other descendant of David could be said to be, the Son of God**; and this son, when he sits upon David’s throne, is to maintain peace ‘as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. (Psa 72:5) consequently he must be immortal. And that he was intended to be David’s superior, is proved by David himself calling him his Lord; saying, ‘Yahweh said unto my Lord (*Adon*), sit thou on my right hand till I make thy foes thy footstool.’ Now David never referred to any of his sons, not even Solomon as **my Lord**. Clearly none of the kings who descended from him would be worthy of the title. But David was promised a descendent whom he could acknowledge as Lord because God had promised ‘I will be his Father’.

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