

The God who Lives—

The Witness of the Old Testament  
(Part 1)

# Introduction: The New Testament Witness

## Introduction: The New Testament Witness (1)

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**The NT refers to the Living God often, and it is a key element in the teaching of the NT deepest in OT background:**

- *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:16)
- *As the **living Father** sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.* (Jn 6:57).
- *And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having **the seal of the living God**; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,* (Revelation 7:2)

## Introduction: The New Testament Witness (2)

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### **Rabbi Saul of Tarsus / Apostle Paul (1)**

- *and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that **you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.** (Acts 14:15)*
- *“AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, ‘YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,’ THERE THEY **SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.**” (Romans 9:26)*
- *being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with **the Spirit of the living God**, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:3)*

## Introduction: The New Testament Witness (3)

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### **Rabbi Saul of Tarsus / Apostle Paul (2)**

- *Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the **temple of the living God**; just as God said, “**I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.** (2 Corinthians 6:16)*
- *but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the **church of the living God**, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)*
- *For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have **fixed our hope on the living God**, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. (1 Timothy 4:10)*

## Introduction: The New Testament Witness (4)

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### Book of Hebrews

- *Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that **falls away from the living God**.* (Hebrews 3:12)
- *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to **serve the living God**?* (Hebrews 9:14)
- *It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of **the living God**.* (Hebrews 10:31)
- *But you have come to Mount Zion and to **the city of the living God**, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,* (Hebrews 12:22)

Historical Background:

But weren't ALL gods 'alive'...?

## Historical Background: But weren't ALL gods 'alive'...? (1)

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**Yes, but only in the same sense humans are--compare the world outside the bible (1):**

- The Mesopotamian flood/Noah story Atrahasis:

*The Anunnaki, the great gods, (III iii 30)*

*Were sitting in thirst and hunger (III iii 31)*

*Their lips were feverishly athirst (III iv 21)*

*They were suffering cramp from hunger. (III iv 22)*

*[The gods sniffed] the smell, [III v 34)*

*They gathered [like flies] over the offering [III v 35]*

*[After] they had eaten the offering [III v 36]*

- "Like their human counterparts, the **gods had regular needs for food, drink, bathing, clothing, sex, and admiration.** Ritual texts from the ancient Near East prescribed how these needs were met." [OT:ATSHB, 149]



## Historical Background: But weren't ALL gods 'alive'...? (2A)

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**Yes, but only in the same sense humans are--compare the world outside the bible (2):**

- “Several allusions suggest that the [Mesopotamian] gods were ‘washed’ periodically and ritually, that **baths** were given to (statues and images of) the gods, and that this gesture, through a **concern for purification, cleanliness, and good health**, which was shared among the great as well as the less great of the world... we are much better informed about the **gods’ clothing**, above all about their **collections of outfits**. Similar to lists of food, we have lists of clothing... **Clothing and jewelry**, could be locked up, preserved, and inventoried together... The ‘maintenance of the gods’ as concerned festive clothing and precious jewelry was thus in no way inferior to the pomp and ceremony surrounding their food offerings. “ [OT:RIAM, 132,133; Note: this is so alien to OT thought, which could have no images of God to begin with.]

## Historical Background: But weren't ALL gods 'alive'...? (2B)

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**Yes, but only in the same sense humans are--compare the world outside the bible (2):**

- "In an **Egyptian** temple the service went on ceaselessly from dawn to dusk to ensure that the spirit of the god be content to swell in the cult image hidden away in the interior and not abandon it. At dawn the officiating priest approached the tabernacle that contained the awesome statue. It had been closed and sealed as part of the evening ceremonies of the day before; he broke the clay seals and, amid incantations and prescribed prayers and clouds of incense, **drew forth the sacred image**--probably of wood lavishly adorned with gold--and then **did for it what the palace valets did for the pharaoh**: he bathed and **perfumed** it, **dressed** it in clothes and jewelry, **garlanded** it with fresh flowers, and, replacing it in its shrine, offered it **food** and **drink**. All day long the ceremony went on, a continuum of music, dance, and hymns. At dusk the priest shut the door, resealed it..." [HI:ELAE:93]

## Historical Background: But weren't ALL gods 'alive'...? (3)

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### **Contrast this with the God of the Hebrew Bible (1):**

*Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God.  
Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me.  
I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds.  
For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds  
of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.  
If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine.  
Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?  
Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.  
Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me. [Ps 50]*

- **"God did not need sacrifices; the people did need them. God possessed already all the animals of the world, birds and beasts, domestic and wild (vv 10–11). He had no pressing need for an extra steer or a couple of billy goats, as if he were running short of provisions (v 13)! From one perspective, the language is comical, for it presupposes a rather weak and hungry God, waiting desperately for the next sacrifice to fill his belly, but the power of the language comes from its nature as caricature. To think of sacrifices as something that God literally required was precisely to reduce God to this absurdly hungry deity; yet a superficial and formal offering of sacrifices, based on obedience to stipulations and nothing else, was tantamount to such a view of God."** [WBC, in loc]

## Historical Background: But weren't ALL gods 'alive'...? (4A)

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### **Contrast this with the God of the Hebrew Bible (2):**

- "The charge God lays against them is not concerned with sacrifice as such (v. 8; for sacrifice and burnt offering, see 40:6) but with the attitude which lies behind the people's bringing of sacrifices. **They seem to think that God needs their sacrifices, that if he did not get his daily allotment of "bulls" and "goats" (v. 9) he would suffer from malnutrition. What nonsense! With irony and not a little amusement, God points out that he has his own well-stocked larder to draw from.** The wild animals in the forests, the cattle who roam the hills in their thousands (cf. REB), all the birds in the air (here the NRSV follows the early versions, reading "air" or heavens for "mountains"), the teeming life in the fields—all belong to me, says God. In any case, if I were hungry, do you think I would tell you? **We are reminded of Deut. 32:37–38, which contains a satirical attack upon the gods of other nations** "who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their libations" and were powerless....

## Historical Background: But weren't ALL gods 'alive'...? (4B)

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### Contrast this with the God of the Hebrew Bible (2):

- **".... Over against this, the psalm stresses one vital point which, in its broadest terms, we may put as follows: God does not need our worship, but we need to worship God. God would still be God if we offered him nothing, but we would not be truly human if we did not make an offering.** Sacrifice should have been food for thought, not food for God. That is why the essence of true worship is spelled out in terms of a "sacrifice of thanksgiving" and the paying of "vows" (v. 14)." [Davidson, R., M.A. (1998). *The vitality of worship : A commentary on the book of Psalms (164–165)*. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Edinburgh: W.B. Eerdmans; Handsel Press.]

The ANE never actually refers to any of their gods as "the living god"--although they really 'acted up' in all the myths!

But before we make fun of *their* idols, think about what THEY would say about *ours*!

The First Mention of the Living God--

In a Place Name

# The First Mention of the Living God--in a Place Name

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## Genesis 16.14 - Hagar

*So the well there, between Kadesh and Bered, was called Beer Lahai Roi. (“the well of the Living One who sees me.”) [The Everyday Bible: New Century Version]*

- The story of Hagar

"The barren Sarai gives Hagar to Abram “as a wife” (Gen. 16:3), making any would-be offspring a legal heir according to contemporary Mesopotamian law. Sarai comes to rue the day she manipulated such a union. Hagar, upon conceiving, scorns Sarai (Gen. 16:4), driving Sarai to abuse her in return. Hagar flees into the desert wilderness, pregnant and on foot, headed 240 km. (150 mi.) south to Shur. The angel of the Lord sends her back to Sarai with promises similar to those made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Her son, to be named Ishmael, would produce offspring too numerous to count (Gen. 16:10)—12 tribes which would become a great nation (17:20). [Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible (538). Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans.]

- First understood/stated by an Egyptian slave-woman!
- Why did she call YHWH 'living'? -- because of Seeing and Hearing
- First appearance of the Angel of the Lord...

First Statement that God is Alive ... is by Himself



# First Statement that God is Alive is by Himself (1)

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## Numbers 14

*But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared,*

*‘The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’*

*“Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”*

*So the LORD said, “I have pardoned them according to your word; but indeed, **as I live**, and as all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD, surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.*

- The story of the spies

## First Statement that God is Alive is by Himself (2A)

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### God's Character

"The second tack that Moses takes is to **affirm the splendors of the character of God, particularly his grace**. He says, "Now may the LORD's strength be displayed!" (v.17). At this point Moses moves from the reputation of the Lord to the character of the Lord, presenting a **composite quotation of his own words of loyal love for and faithful discipline of his people** (see Exod 20:6; 34:6–7). These are the basic ideas of the Hebrew Bible in its revelation of the character of God. Moderns who have rejected the message of the OT have often done so on the basis of a "bad rap." They have been taught through popular culture and through misinformed religionists that the "God of the OT" is a god of wrath whereas the God of the NT is all mercy and grace.

## First Statement that God is Alive is by Himself (2B)

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### God's Character

**"... But Moses knew God intimately. He knew him as a consuming fire; he also knew his warm embrace.** We tend to focus on the flashes of God's wrath. Moses reminds us that **while the wrath is real, it is long delayed.** The most remarkable thing about the wrath of God is how much provocation he tolerates before he finally acts in righteous judgment. I suspect that there are occasions when we all have wished that God would "zap" this evil or reach out and destroy that evil. But the fact that he has not is a loving reminder that he may extend his patience with us as well. [EBC]

## First Statement that God is Alive is by Himself (3)

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The surety of His life!

*"as I live.* **God swears by his own life**, just as humans swear by God's life (see below, in v 28; and cf. Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24). God may also swear by his **holiness** (Amos 4:2), or by his "self" (Amos 6:8). [AYBC]

*"as I live* Man swears by God but the Lord God swears by **His own life, essence, or being since there is no superior entity** (e.g., Gen. 22:16). [JPS]

*"and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son [Gen 22.16]*

God Living "inside" Israel's History

# God Living "inside" Israel's History (1)

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## Deuteronomy 5 - Moses and the Israelite leaders

*“And when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders.*

*“You said, ‘Behold, the LORD our God has **shown** us His glory and His greatness, and we have **heard** His voice from the midst of the fire; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives. ‘Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we **hear** the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we will **die**. **For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?** Go near and hear all that the LORD our God says; then speak to us all that the LORD our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do it.’*

*“The LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!’*

## God Living "inside" Israel's History (2)

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- The story at Sinai
- Hearing and Seeing again

"The **demonstration** of God's power has made the people conscious of His character as "the living God." This epithet expresses **God's effectiveness in contrast to the lifelessness of false gods**. The epithet is used similarly before another demonstration of God's power, the crossing of the Jordan on dry land, when Joshua announces: "By this you shall know that a living God is among you." [Tigay, J. H. (1996). Deuteronomy. The JPS Torah commentary (73). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.]

## God Living "inside" Israel's History (3)

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- Mortals in the presence of the Living God...

"God approved of what the people said, because it **sprang from a consciousness of the unworthiness of any sinner to come into the presence of the holy God**; and He added, "Would that there were always this heart in them to fear Me," i.e., would that they were always of the same mind to fear Me and keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and their children for ever. [Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (2002). Commentary on the Old Testament. (Dt 5:24–27). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.]

"The **idea that no one can see God and live appears in** the narrative of Moses' seeing the Lord's glory (Exod 33:18–23), in the experience of Gideon (Judg 6:22–23), and in that of Manoah and his wife (Judg 13:22). [EBC]



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