



Thomas Said: “My Lord and My God” A Grammatical and Contextual Assessment of John 20:28



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Abstract

In this article, I briefly examine “The proclamation of the faith of St. Thomas,” where he supposedly refers to Jesus as “his Lord and his God.” The material at hand will analyze the matter through contextual and grammatical viewpoints. By the means of Biblical Greek grammar, it will be elucidated that the claim is baseless as well as contradictory to Jesus’ teachings as recorded in the Bible.

Keywords

St. Thomas, John 20:28, Biblical Greek Grammar, Greek Vocative Case, Jesus' Divinity, Translation Errors.

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Introduction

Very few Bible believing Christians are able to read the Hebrew or Greek texts. Therefore, their understanding of the Bible is in the hands of translators and interpreters of the book. In many cases, as scholars universally acknowledge, translations contain numerous mistakes,¹ perhaps due to misunderstanding of the Hebrew/Greek literature. This deficiency is not limited to modern day translations as ancient Bible scholars faced many of the same challenges when working with the texts. Take the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, as an example. There are many misunderstandings of the Hebrew idiomatic usage of words in this translation. An example is the Hebrew word עַלְמָה (*‘almāh*) in Isaiah 7:14 in both Dead Sea scrolls and Masoretic, which translates into English as "young woman". However, the Septuagint interpreters translated it into the Koine Greek as παρθένος (*parthenos*); that is "virgin" in English. We know that the Hebrew word for "virgin" is בְּתוּלָה (*betulah*) not עַלְמָה (*‘almāh*). The Greek Gospel of Matthew makes the same mistake when quoting from Isaiah, perhaps relying on the Septuagint (1:23).

An effective translation requires the translator to have not only a strong command of both languages but also an understanding of the cultures that shape them. This is especially important when interpreting an ancient text in a modern context. Many examples illustrate this issue, but this article will focus on a specific case: John 20:28, where common Bible translations suggest that Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, referred to Jesus as his "Lord" and "God."

1. See *The Great Awakening on Temperance and The Great Controversy, Romanism, Protestantism and Judaism* (1878), A series of Lectures, Papers and biographies from the Ablest Advocates of Temperance, and prominent clergymen of the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Jewish Churches. Also see Hoffman (2016).

In what follows, we will present three arguments: the context in which the text is written, the Greek grammar of the passage, and a deeper analysis of the Greek words “Κύριος” and “Θεός,” translated as “Lord” and “God.” These arguments will demonstrate that Thomas did not call Jesus his God. Even if we set aside the context and grammar and assume that Thomas was addressing Jesus as his God and Lord, it would still be extremely difficult to interpret these words as referring to the true God of the Bible—Jehovah, the Creator. This is because the terms “Κύριος” and “Θεός” are also used for beings other than God the Creator.

Let us first read the verse in Greek, with its transliteration and King James translation:

John 20:28:

ἀπεκρίθη Θωμᾶς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Ὁ Κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου.

Apekrithē Thōmas kai eipen auto HO Kyrios mou kai ho Theos mou

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

John 20:28 in Context

John 20 recounts the events following the crucifixion, when people believed that Jesus had been crucified, killed, and buried on Friday. Mary Magdalene waited for the Sabbath (Saturday) to pass, and early the next morning, she went to the tomb. Finding it empty, she soon saw Jesus standing beside her. He then instructed her to go and tell the disciples that he was still alive.

In the evening of the same day, Jesus suddenly appeared in a house where all his disciples, except for Thomas, had gathered to hide

from the Jewish leaders. Amazed to see him alive, the joyful disciples relayed Jesus' greeting to an initially skeptical Thomas, who refused to believe the news that Jesus was still alive. He said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (v. 25).

After eight days, when all the disciples, this time including Thomas, had gathered in the same house, Jesus appeared again and invited Thomas to touch his hands and side, urging him not to doubt. Seeing that Jesus was truly alive, Thomas exclaimed the following problematic verse: "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). But did Thomas actually call Jesus his Lord and God? Or did he, out of surprise and excitement, simply exclaim, "My Lord and my God?"

Thomas was undoubtedly astonished. Having initially rejected the testimony of the other disciples and insisting that he must touch Jesus himself to believe, his shock at seeing Jesus before him is understandable. However, there are additional reasons to question the common Christian interpretation, including Jesus' own statements, Greek grammar, and the meanings of the words "Κύριός" and "Θεός."

Jesus Rejects His Divinity

There are many instances in the Bible that not only contradict the Trinitarian belief that Thomas referred to Jesus as his God but even refute it in a rather obvious manner, some of which are stated by Jesus himself. Consider the following examples:

- Jesus is Not Good

When someone addressed Jesus as "Good Teacher," he objected to being called "good":

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to

inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered.
"No one is good--except God alone. (Mark 10:17-18)

Unless we assume that Mark and John disagreed on the identity of Jesus, it is difficult to accept that Jesus would allow Thomas to refer to him as his God without promptly correcting him. If Jesus refused to be called "good," it follows that he would not accept being called God.

- God is not seen

John explicitly describes God as unseen by anyone: "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18). While there are differences in opinion regarding the translation of the rest of this verse, nearly all translators render the first part similarly (see, for example, NIV, ESV, NLT, KJB, ASV).

- Jesus has God

When Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, he tells her that he is going to *his God*:

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

- Jesus did not know the Hour

Jesus, perhaps speaking of his second coming, makes a statement that clearly contradicts what one would expect from God. He declares that no one knows the hour—neither the angels nor the Son, but only the Father. Since God is omniscient, Jesus, by his own admission, is not God.

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Matthew 24:36)

“God” and “Lord” in the New Testament

Since "Lord" and "God" are titles, they do not necessarily

denote divinity. The Greek words translated as "Lord" and "God" are *κύριος* (kurios) and *θεός* (theos), respectively. These terms are also used for other beings and can mean "master" and "god." Nevertheless, when they are (in some cases, presumably) used to describe Jesus, Trinitarians have translated them as "Lord" and "God." See the examples below:

- Slave and Master

The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his **master** (κύριον). (Matthew 10:24)

It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their **masters** (κύριος). If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! (Matthew 10:25)

- Satan, the god of this world:

The **god** (ὁ θεός) of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

In fact, the Greek New Testament has no exclusive word for "God the Creator," unlike the Hebrew Bible, where "Yahweh" is used exclusively for God.

Vocative Case

It is important to note that, in my opinion, ancient Greek has two distinct types of vocative cases: direct and indirect. These can also be referred to as second- and third-person vocatives or as present and absent vocatives. The choice of vocative form depends on whether the addressee is present or absent in the conversation. This differs significantly from most modern languages, including English, where no such distinction exists.

Note that the third-person case is not a true vocative; rather, it is merely an expression of feeling. However, I refer to it as an indirect—or third-person—vocative because, at first glance, it may appear vocative in translations, though in Greek, it is not considered a vocative at all but simply a way of expressing emotion.

In English, we say: "O my dear," "O teacher," "O sir," "Sir," "Madam," "O people," "O father," and so on. These expressions do not indicate whether the addressee is present or absent in the conversation. However, in Greek, there are two distinct ways to address someone, depending on their presence or absence. If the addressee is not present in the conversation, they will be addressed with an article before the noun, along with an attached suffix. This construction expresses emotion rather than directly calling on the addressee. However, if the addressee is present and actively engaged in the conversation—meaning they are being directly addressed—there will be no article and no suffix attached to the noun. In some cases, a noun in the vocative case may be preceded by the particle $\tilde{\omega}$ (omega) to add emphasis or express emotion. This should not be mistaken for a vocative article. For example:

Examples of $\tilde{\omega}$ + vocative to add an emotional emphasis:

Mark 9:19									
<i>αὐτοῖς</i>	<i>λέγει</i>	$\tilde{\omega}$	<i>γενεὰ</i>	<i>ἄπιστος!</i>	<i>ἕως</i>	<i>πότε</i>	<i>πρὸς</i>	<i>ὕμῃς</i>	<i>ἔσομαι?</i>
<i>autois</i>	<i>legei</i>	$\tilde{\omega}$	<i>genea</i>	<i>apistos!</i>	<i>heōs</i>	<i>pote</i>	<i>pros</i>	<i>hymas</i>	<i>esomai?</i>
to them	he says	Oh	generation	unbelieving	until	when	with	you	will I be?

I Timothy 6:11									
σὺ	δέ	ὦ	ἄνθρωπε	θεοῦ	ταῦτα	φεῦγε	δίωκε	δὲ	δικαιοσύνην
sy	de	ō	anthrōpe	Theou	tauta	pheuge	diōke	de	dikaiosynēn
you	but	o	man	of God	these things	you flee	you pursue	but (instead)	righteousness

- Examples of direct vocative: noun without an article or a suffix

Matthew 8 tells us that a man with an illness asks Jesus for help by saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." In Greek: "Κύριε, ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαι με καθαρίσαι." The word *Κύριε* (*kurie*) is a direct call to Jesus, as he is present in the conversation, meaning the man is speaking to him face to face. This is why the noun *Κύριε* (Master, Lord) appears without an article and without a suffix. In contrast, Ὁ Κύριός in John 20:28 is an indirect call on the addressee, following a different grammatical structure.

Matthew 8:2:

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, **"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."**

Matthew 8:2						
Greek	Κ ύ ρ ι ε	ἐ ὰ ν	θέ λ η ς	δύ να σαι	με	κα θα ρί σαι
Transliteration	K y	ea n	thelēs	dynasai	m e	katharissai

	ri e					
Translation	L o r d	if	willin g	you are able	m e	to make clean

Another example:

Luke recounts the story of a man who asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life. He addresses him by saying, “Good Teacher,” which in Greek is “Διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ.” The noun Διδάσκαλε (*didaskale*, meaning “teacher”) appears without the article ὁ (omicron) or the suffix ος (omicron sigma).

Luke 18:1:

A certain ruler asked him, "**Good teacher (Διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ)**, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Because Jesus is being directly addressed here, the man therefore calls him Διδάσκαλε (Didaskale), not ὁ διδάσκαλος (O didaskalos). The same rule applies to “Lord” and “God” in Greek—“Κύριος” and “Θεός.” As we read in Matthew, the man on the cross—supposedly Jesus—calls on God: Θεέ μου (My God).

Matthew 27:46:

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" Which means "**My God, my God, (Θεέ μου Θεέ μου)** why have you forsaken me?"

According to the above verse, Jesus addresses God directly and calls on Him: "My God" (Θεέ μου, *Thee mou*). As this is a second-

person—or direct—vocative case, neither an article nor a suffix is used. However, in John 20:28, where Thomas says, Ὁ Κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου (“Ho Kyrios mou kai ho Theos mou”), the article ὁ and the suffix -ος are present. This is not a vocative statement. However, if one were to assume it is, it would be a third-person—or indirect—vocative, meaning the addressee (God) is not present in the conversation. In other words, Jesus is not the addressee, as he is standing before Thomas and speaking to him.

This is seen again in the following verse, where Jesus directly addresses God as “Father”:

Luke 20:23:

Jesus said, **“Father” [Πάτερ (Pater)]**, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

This is also a direct vocative, as Jesus directly calls “Father” [Πάτερ (Pater)] without an article or suffix. One final example to conclude the argument is when Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, calls on the Father directly—again without an article or suffix:

Matthew 26: 39:

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, **"My Father (Πάτερ μου)**, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Conclusion

Thomas used an indirect vocative case—if it can be called a vocative at all—to express his emotions upon seeing Jesus alive. It is natural to exclaim, “Oh my God,” when we are shocked, surprised, scared, or excited. That is the context in which Thomas expressed his excitement, joy, or shock upon seeing Jesus alive after ten days of disappointment and sorrow, having believed the rumors circulating in

town that Jesus had been killed on the cross. This is what the context suggests. Furthermore, even Greek grammar rules out the assumption that Thomas directly addressed Jesus as his Lord and God (Ὁ Κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου—"Ho Kyrios mou kai ho Theos mou"). The nouns (Κύριος and Θεός, Lord and God), preceded by the article ὁ and ending with the suffix -ος, are not in the expected vocative form in Greek. This leaves no doubt that Thomas did not address Jesus as his Lord and God but rather expressed his astonishment. Even if one assumes that Thomas intended to address Jesus by saying, "My Lord and my God," this does not necessarily imply that he was calling Jesus "God, the true and only Creator," as the titles Κύριος and Θεός do not inherently carry that meaning. Lastly, Jesus himself left no room for doubt that he was not God on multiple occasions—for instance, he rejected being called "good," stated that he was going to his God and the disciples' God, admitted he did not know "the Hour," and more. All these points confirm that Jesus was not God the Creator.

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