**Lord**

Almost every time the word “Lord” occurs in the New Testament, it is a translation of the Greek word *kurios* (#2962 κύριος). *Kurios* is a title indicating respect and high position in society, and it is used many times in the New Testament. Likewise, almost every time the word “Lord” occurs in the Old Testament, it is a translation of *adoni/adonai* (from אָדוֹן), which is also a title indicating high position or rank.

It confuses some modern readers that God is called “Lord,” Jesus is called “Lord,” and other people are called “Lord,” but that would not confuse anyone in the first century. The words *kurios* and *adoni* were general terms for someone who was above you in rank or position, like “boss” or “captain,” and sometimes it was used simply as a term of respect, just like we sometimes use the word “sir.” If we need to ask a question to a stranger, we might start by saying, “Excuse me, sir,” even though the person is not nobility and may not even be a good person. “Lord” was used in a similar fashion.

Trinitarian commentators and pastors frequently assert that the title “Lord” turns Jesus into God, and will use both Old and New Testament passages to attempt to support that claim. However, surveying the uses of “Lord” in both the Old and New Testaments clearly demonstrates that it does not make one “divine.”

In the New Testament:

* God is called “Lord” (Matt. 1:20; 11:25; Acts 2:39; 1 Tim. 6:15; James 5:10).
* Jesus is called “Lord” (Matt. 7:21; Acts 10:36; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:5).
* Property owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 20:8; 21:40; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:13; Gal. 4:1, “owner” = *kurios*).
* Heads of households are called “Lord” (Mark 13:35; Luke 16:3, “owner” = *kurios*).
* Slave owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 10:24; 18:25, 31, 32, 34; 24:45; Luke 12:43; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1, “master” = *kurios*).
* Husbands are called “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6, “master” = *kurios*).
* A son calls his father “Lord” (Matt. 21:30, “sir” = *kurios*).
* “Lord” was used in respectful address. The Greeks called Philip, “Lord.” Mary Magdalene called the person she thought was the gardener, “Lord.” Cornelius called the angel, “Lord.” John called one of the elders, “Lord.” (John 12:21; 20:15; Acts 10:4; Rev. 7:14, “sir” = *kurios*).
* The Roman Emperor is called “Lord” (Acts 25:26, “His Majesty” = *kurios*).
* Roman authorities are called “Lord” (Matt. 27:63, “sir” = *kurios*).

In the Old Testament there are also many humans who are called “Lord.” In fact, in the Hebrew, the authors use different endings to the Hebrew word *adon*, depending on whether it is referring to humans/angels or to God. The Brown, Driver, Briggs Lexicon specifies that *adoni* is used of “lords” who are not God, while *adonai* is used in reference to God as Lord.

1. References to men (*adoni*):
   1. *master*: Gen. 24:12; 44:5; Exod. 21:5; 1 Sam. 30:13, 15; 2 Kings 5:3, 20, 22; 6:15
   2. *husband*: Gen. 18:12
   3. *prophet*: 1 Kings 18:7, 13; 2 Kings 2:19; 4:16, 28; 6:5; 8:5
   4. *prince*: Gen. 42:10, Gen. 23:6, 11, 15; 42:10; 43:20; 44:18; 47:18; Judg. 4:18
   5. *king*: 1 Sam. 22:12
   6. *father*: Gen. 31:5
   7. *Moses*: Exod. 32:22; Num. 11:28; 12:11; 32:26, 27; 36:2
   8. *priest*: 1 Sam. 1:15, 26
   9. *theophanic angel* [an angel representing God]: Josh. 5:14; Judg. 6:13
   10. *captain*: 2 Sam. 11:11
   11. *general recognition of superiority*: Gen. 24:18; 32:5; 33:8; 44:7; Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam. 25:24.
2. References to God (*adonai*):

Gen. 18:3, 27, 30, 31, 32; 19:2, 18; Exod. 4:10; 5:22; 15:17; Num. 14:17; Deut. 3:24; 9:26; Josh. 7:8; Judg. 6:15; 1 Kings 22:6; 2 Kings 19:23; Neh. 1:11; 4:8; Job 28:28; Isa. 37:24; Jer. 1:6; 4:10; Mic. 1:2; Amos 7:7; 9:1; Zech. 9:4; Mal. 1:12; etc. [[1]](#footnote-13663)

*Adoni* is always used in Scripture to describe human masters and lords, but *never* God. *Focus on the Kingdom* reports:

“The Bible in Psalm 110:1 actually gives the Messiah the title that *never describes God*. The word is *adoni* and in all of its 195 occurrences in the Old Testament it means a superior who is human (or occasionally angelic), created and not God. So Psalm 110:1 presents the clearest evidence that the Messiah is not God, but a supremely exalted man.”[[2]](#footnote-14690)

So that students can study the uses of *adōni* (אֲדֹנִי) for themselves (since most sources only give the root words), we list below its occurrences in the Old Testament.

**The following 148 verses contain 166 uses of the word** ***adoni*** **[אדֹנִי]*.*** Every one of them either refers to a human lord or an angel. None refers to God: Gen. 23:6, 11,15; 24:12 (2x), Gen. 24:14, 18, 27 (3x), Gen. 24:35, 36, 37, 39, 42, 44, 48 (2x), Gen. 24:49, 65; 31:35; 33:8, 13, 14 (2x), Gen. 33:15; 39:8; 42:10; 43:20; 44:5, 7, 18 (2x), Gen. 44:19, 20, 22, 24; 47:18 (2x), Gen. 47:25; Exod. 21:5; 32:22; Num. 11:28; 12:11; 32:25, 27; 36:2; Josh. 5:14; 10:1, 3; Judg. 1:5, 6, 7; 4:18; 6:13; Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam. 1:15, 26(2x); 1 Sam. 22:12; 24:8; 25:24, 25(2x), 1 Sam. 25:26(2x), 1 Sam. 25:27, 28, 29, 31, 41; 26:17, 18,19; 29:8; 30:13, 15; 2 Sam. 1:10; 3:21; 9:11; 11:11; 13:32, 33; 14:9, 12, 15, 17(2x), 2 Sam. 14:18,19(2x), 2 Sam. 14:22; 15:15, 21(2x); 2 Sam. 16:4, 9; 18:31, 32; 19:19 (2x), 2 Sam. 19:20, 26, 27, 30, 35, 37; 24:3, 21, 22; 1 Kings 1:13, 17, 18, 20(2x), 1 Kings 1:21, 24, 27(2x), 1 Kings 1:31, 36, 37(2x); 1 Kings 2:38; 3:17, 26; 18:7, 10; 20:4; 2 Kings 2:19; 4:16, 28; 5:3, 18, 20, 22; 6:5, 12, 15, 26; 8:5, 12; 10:9; 18:23, 24, 27; 1 Chron. 21:3(2x), 1 Chron. 23; 2 Chron. 2:14, 15; Isa. 36:8, 9, 12; Jer. 37:20; 38:9; Dan. 1:10; 10:16, 17(2x), Dan. 1:19; 12:8; Zech. 1:9; 4:4, 5, 13; 6:4.[[3]](#footnote-22830)

**The following 24 uses can be found under [*l’adōni*; לַאדֹנִי], “to my Lord.”** While we in English separate the preposition from the noun or verb following, in Hebrew the preposition is attached directly to the word. Gen. 24:3, 54, 56; 32:5, 6, 19; 44:9, 16, 33; 1 Sam. 24:7; 25:27, 28, 30, 31; 2 Sam. 4:8; 19:29; 1 Kings 1:2; 18:13; 20:9; 1 Chron. 21:3; Ps. 110:1. All these refer to human lords, not God.

**The following 6 references can be found under [*v’adōni*; וַאדֹנִי]:** Gen. 18:12; Num. 36:2; 2 Sam. 11:11; 14:20; 19:28; 24:3.

**The following reference can be found under [*m\_adōni*; מֵאֲדֹנִי]:** Gen. 47:18.

Scholars recognize that there is a distinction between the words *adoni* and *adonai*, and that these distinctions are important. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes:

The form *ADONI* (“my lord”), a royal title (1 Sam. 29:8), is to be carefully distinguished from the divine title *ADONAI* (“my Lord”) used of *Yahweh*.[[4]](#footnote-17096)

Now, to be fair, *adonai’w,* which is a third-person plural form but is typically translated “his lord” (Gen. 24:9; 39:2, etc.), and *adonēka,* a second-person plural form typically translated “your lord” (Gen. 44:8; 1 Sam. 26:15; etc.), do occur in reference to people. Yet, still, for the vast majority of cases, the first-person plural form *adonai* is reserved as a title for God throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Clearly, from all of the above evidence, calling someone “Lord” does not make them God. It is a case of poor scholarship to believe that calling Jesus “Lord” makes him God, because if calling someone “Lord” made them God, then all the other people we saw above who were called “Lord” would be God also.

Furthermore, the Bible says it was “God” who made Jesus “Lord.” Acts 2:36 says: “God has *made* this Jesus...both Lord and Christ.” If “Lord” equals “God,” then somehow God *made* Jesus “God,” which is something that even Trinitarians do not teach, because it is vital to Trinitarian doctrine that Jesus be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. The fact that the Bible says God *made* Jesus “Lord” is an argument *against* the Trinity. That God, Jesus, property owners, slave owners, Roman authorities, fathers, husbands, and even strangers are called “Lord” caused no problem for first-century Greeks. They knew *kurios* was a word that communicated respect and social position.

Similarly, the fact that the Hebrew text uses the word *adoni* of the Messiah in Psalm 110 is very strong proof that he is not God. If the Messiah was to be God, then the word *adonai* would have been used. This distinction between *adoni* (a lord) and *adonai* (the Lord, God) holds even when God shows up in human form. In Genesis 18:3, Abraham addresses God who was “disguised” as a human, but the text uses *adonai*.

One thing that complicates the study of the word “Lord” is that many translations of the New Testament only translate *kurios* as “Lord” when it refers to Christ or God, when it refers to others they use “master,” “sir,” “owner,” etc. This complicates what would otherwise be a simple study, and it falsely strengthens the belief that if both Jesus and God, and only Jesus and God, are called “Lord,” then Jesus must be God. That is simply not true. *Kurios* was a commonly used word in Greek, and, as was previously stated, was a term of respect and social standing.

When an important verse such as Romans 10:9 tells us that we must confess Christ as *kurios* (Lord) to be saved, it is saying that we must recognize Jesus as boss, one who has authority over us. Both God and Jesus have authority over us because Jesus sits at God’s right hand and administers His work. Jesus has been given all authority on heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). He is Lord (1 Cor. 8:6).

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on *adonai* in the Old Testament, see commentary on Psa. 110:1.]

1. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. אָדוֹן, *Adon*, “Lord,” 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-13663)
2. Anthony Buzzard, “Believing Impossible Things,” *Focus on the Kingdom* 2, no. 6 (March 2000), 4 (emphasis the author’s). [↑](#footnote-ref-14690)
3. WTT or BHS Hebrew Old Testament, edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudoph of Deutsche Bibelgesellschoft, Stuttgart, fourth corrected ed, © 1966, 1977, 1983, 1990 by the German Bible Society. [↑](#footnote-ref-22830)
4. Geoffrey Bromiley, *ISBE*, s.v. “Lord.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17096)