

A number of people have asked me how anyone could imagine a human being or becoming God in the ancient world, based on my claims that for Paul and other early Christian writers Jesus was a divine human. But if he was human, how could he be God? To answer that I have to stress a point I made repeatedly in my book *How Jesus Became God*. Anyone who wants to say that “Jesus is God” according to an early Christian text, has to explain “in what *sense*” is he God?

Now is a good time for me to lay out how again how ancient people understood the divine realm. It was very different from the way most people today do – at least the people I run across.

People today think of God as completely Other than us humans. We are mortal and limited in every respect; he is immortal and unlimited. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere-present. We are by comparison weak, ignorant, and in one place at a time. He is infinite and eternal; we are finite and temporal. There is an unbridgeable gap between us and God. (Although in Christian theology, it is Jesus who bridges that gap by being a divine being who becomes human; in traditional theology, he did that so that we humans could then become divine)

People in the ancient world did not think of the divine realm o that way- both pagans (more obviously) and Jews (less obviously). Stick with the multitude of pagan religions for now.

True, the major Gods were enormously powerful and knowing and were immortal (you couldn’t kill them, and they couldn’t kill each other. And they never died). But there were lots of different gods with lots of different power and knowledge. And many of the gods (nearly all of them) came into being at some point in the past. They haven’t always existed, so they were *immortal* not *eternal*. Like us, they get born. And like us, gods have strengths and weaknesses, and rarely were gods imagined as all-knowing, and almost never as all-powerful.

But there were gods and there were gods. I try to illustrate the divine realm to my students by speaking in terms of a divine pyramid.

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