

Is God One or Three?

The Orthodox Jew has always maintained that God is one and that no other gods exist. Christians believe the same only that God is three-in-one. Who is right? What does the Bible say or imply? The answer may be found encrypted in basic physics.

A major disagreement Jews hold toward Christianity is their adherence to the concept of the trinity. To the orthodox Jew, Christians are nothing more than idol worshipping gentiles—being thereby polytheistic and not monotheistic. I, for one, am glad that scripture does not try to hide God, but reveals His being in as true a form as the written word or the limits of our terrestrial thinking would allow. To understand where the truth resides, let us look to the pages of the Tanach and see which concept holds the most plausibility.

God is One

The Jews are correct in their adamant adherence to the monotheistic view. There is only one God and Creator, one all-powerful deity and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. This is indisputable, yet there are a couple areas that may give the diligent student pause.

Hints in the Shema

The Hebrew *Shema* prayer found in Deuteronomy states clearly that Jehovah is one.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד
ECHAD YHVH ELOHIM, YHVH YISRAEL, SHEMA
is one. Jehovah is G-d, Jehovah Oh Israel, Hear

(Note: read right to left)

If you carefully trace each word of the Shema you will see that the title of God is not the singular *El* but the plural *Elohim*. God, through Moses, is identifying Himself in a plural noun form. Yet, He also states that He is one. How can this be reconciled? The rabbis will tell you that the title *Elohim* denotes God's all-powerful nature. If this is so, why do the scriptures use *El* in other places? Is He less powerful in those passages? This may be a problem, however, more evidence is found in another word—*echad*.

The word *echad* does indeed translate as “one”, not as a number but as the concept of unity. To see this more clearly, let us look at how *echad* is used elsewhere.

We can find *echad* used in regard to the unity of a husband and his wife.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one (*echad*) flesh. - Genesis 2:24

The *two becoming one* is a compound unity. They do not morph together into some compromised humanoid. They are a single unit with two parts. The same is described of God in the *Shema*. If God meant to be seen as one single entity, He would have used the

Hebrew word *yachid* which equates to the number one. It is translated as “only” or more closely “one and only one”.

Misguided Worship?

Abraham bowed down in worship to a man with two companions and referred to Him as his Lord¹. Joshua was told to remove his shoes when confronted with a man who identified Himself as the “Captain of the Lord’s Host”². Jacob demanded of a man (or angel) to bless him. He called the place Peniel because he *looked into the face of God and lived*.³

The question is, were these three patriarchs misguided in their worship? Can God indeed appear as a man or is His holiness too great to make such an incarnation possible? Is the idea of God coming down as a man impossible for Him? The old question remains, “Where does a bear sleep in the woods?” Answer: “Anywhere he wants”. If God is unable to come down in the form of man, He is *not* all-powerful, He is limited. On the other hand, if God *is* all-powerful and could accomplish such a feat, then the concept of God coming to earth as a man is indeed possible.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, *The mighty God, The everlasting Father*, The Prince of Peace.
- Isaiah 9:6

God is Light

One concept that both Jews and Christians can agree on is that God is light, and in Him is no darkness. His light is unapproachable, even Moses beheld only His “after-glow”.⁴

...the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. - Isaiah 60:19

When the Jews look at this light, they proclaim that God is a solitary white light. The Christian looks at this same light and agree, God is indeed a solitary white light, but hold up three fingers and add the following caveat, “technically, He is made up of three colors.” This then offends the Jewish concept of what they see before them.

For those who do not understand the physics of light, look at a computer monitor with an empty document open in your word processor. You see a white page. Did you know that white light does not exist as a singular source? White light is actually an equal intensity of three primary colors. Take a magnifying glass to your computer monitor, look closer and you will see a cluster of red, green and blue phosphors, these are the primary colors.

¹ Genesis 18

² Joshua 5

³ Genesis 32

⁴ Exodus 33:23

Their close proximity to one another creates the illusion of white. This cluster would be translated into the Hebrew as *echad*, three distinct entities forming a single compound unit.

God in Three Forms

In physics class you learn that there are three basic forms of matter: solid, liquid, and gas. If we were to take a beaker of water and freeze it, what would it become? The beginning student would reply, “Ice”. The professor would correct the student by saying, “No, it does not *become* anything, it is *still* water, just in a different form.” When the same beaker is heated and the water evaporates, what does it become? The enlightened student then replies, “It doesn’t become anything, it is *still* water, but in a different form. In this case, it has become a gas”.

The Redeemer of Israel spoke through Isaiah saying,

"Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His SPIRIT have sent ME." - Isaiah 48:16

God, being God, can take different forms, but he never becomes anything else but God. The scriptures proclaim this concept as we saw demonstrated earlier with Abraham, Joshua and Jacob. But when Christians hold to the idea that Yeshua is God in the form of flesh, the Jew is offended. Jesus died on a Roman cross, so one could argue, how can God die? The answer is simple, God did not die, only the form. A hammer, used to smash the block of ice would not change the molecular structure of the frozen water, only the solid form has been disrupted.

First or Second Coming

When asked regarding the identification of Messiah, the Jews will give a tongue-in-cheek answer, “When he comes, we will ask him, ‘Is this your first or second coming?’” Though this is a typical humorous sidestep to an important question, this event has been prophesied to actually occur. According to the prophet Zechariah, in the last days the Jews will be surrounded by their enemies in Bozrah and be targeted for slaughter. The Messiah will come and vanquish them and will then reveal His identity.

And one shall say to Him, “What are these wounds in Your hands?” Then He shall answer, “Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends.” – Zechariah 13:6

Their response will not be so jovial, for Zechariah also prophesies of that day...

...and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. – Zechariah 12:10

Conclusion

I am the sort who prefers to hear the truth no matter whether it offends me or not. I feel this way regarding my physical health, as well as my spiritual health. Some people want a happy religion that fills their list of needs and does not offend. I prefer that which will prepare me for eternity, that which cleanses the infection out of an open wound.

Rejecting the concept of the trinity has caused the Jewish people to reject Yeshua as Messiah. After all he, being a man, proclaimed Himself to be God. However, if God is indeed all-powerful and could, if He willed to do so, come down as a man, and if such a nature would allow Himself to suffer and die (yet still be God in form and substance), then one must answer by new belief and not tradition-based rejection. When the true white light of God's revelation does shine upon our hearts, we will thereby find the answer to that most difficult question, "Is God One, or Three?"

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God – Job 19:26