

# PART 2 Typical Jewish Objections to the Gospel

## Is God One or Three?

Christians, like Jewish people, believe in only one God. In the Moody Handbook of Theology we learn of the Christian belief that God is one.

*Two thoughts are expressed in the unity of God. First, it emphasizes that God is one numerically. It was this belief that set Israel apart from her polytheistic neighbors. Part of Israel's daily worship was the recitation of the Shema (Deut. 6:4) which affirmed, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" This statement was a declaration of monotheism, affirming that God is one in His essence and cannot be divided. It also affirmed Him as absolutely unique; there is none other that can be compared with Him (cf. Ex. 15:11).<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on God as numerically one is also stressed in 1 Timothy 2:5 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. Second, the unity of God stresses that God is not a composite and cannot be divided into parts. The statement stresses the "inner and qualitative unity" of God. Because the Lord alone is God, none other is to share His glory, hence the prohibition, "Guard yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21).<sup>1</sup>*

While Christians absolutely affirm that God is one, we also see that God has revealed Himself in three persons. (1 Timothy 3:16 notes that "great is the mystery of godliness.")

There is also ample evidence of the tri-unity of God found in the Old Testament. (Gen. 1:26; 11:7; Isa. 48:16) In Gen 1:26 and 11:7 it is important to note the plural pronouns that refer to God. The word "One" that is used of God in the Shema (Deut. 6:4); "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the <sup>b</sup>Lord is one!<sup>2</sup> points to a compound unity and not an absolute unity.

The Hebrew word is "echad" and it refers to a compound unity or a compositeness to God's essence or nature. For other usages of this word with similar connotations see Gen. 2:24; Ex. 36:13,18 (a unity); Num. 13:17-24 (a single cluster); and Ezek. 37:22. When Adam and Eve joined together as one, the two become "echad". The cleaving together of two persons in marriage makes the two persons a compound unity and is a reflection of the person of God as well. We are told in Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."

The Hebrew word "yachid" ("only one") is used in Gen. 22:2 to describe Isaac as Abraham's only or absolutely one, son. This word is never used in the

Bible to describe the oneness of God. In fact, in his Thirteen Principles of (Jewish) Faith, Rabbi Maimonides, in referring to the unity of God changed the text of Deut. 6:4 to read yachid instead of echad. He was obviously aware of the connotation involved when using echad to speak of God. This change can be seen in almost any Jewish prayer book which contains Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith: "I firmly believe that the Creator, blessed be his name, is One; that there is no oneness in any form like his; and that he alone was, is and ever will be our God" (principle #2, Daily Prayer Book, translated by Philip Birnbaum, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949, p153-54)

The term "trinity" is not the best word to describe the unity of God because it emphasizes only the three persons but not the unity within the Trinity. The German word Dreieinigkeit ("three-oneness") better expresses the concept. A proper definition, then, must include the distinctness and equality of the three persons within the Trinity as well as the unity within the Trinity. The word "triunity" may better express the doctrine.<sup>3</sup> A proper definition of the Trinity states: "the Trinity is composed of three united Persons without separate existence—so completely united as to form one God. The divine nature subsists in three distinctions—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

There are numerous times when God appears in flesh among His people in the Old Testament. He appears to Abraham and eats a meal with him. (Genesis 18) He also appears in the form of an angel and wrestles with Jacob in Genesis 32:24-30. When we study the scriptures carefully, we can see the unity and diversity of God. Christians and Jews both agree on that reality.

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1. S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy in The International Critical Commentary 3rd ed.*, (Edinburgh: Clark, 1978), p. 90.

1 Enns, P. P. (1997, c1989). *The Moody hand-book of theology*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press.

a. Matt 22:37; Mark 12:29, 30; Luke 10:27

b. Deut 4:35, 39; John 10:30; 1 Cor 8:4; Eph 4:6

2. *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Dt 6:4). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

3. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, p. 30.

4. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:276

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