

A Divine Yeshua and One God

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Interact with the following statement and offer your response to it (using Scripture to back up your main points): “Anyone who believes that Yeshua is deity is a polytheist (believes in more than one God).”

Why is belief in the deity of Yeshua important and how should this impact our faith? It is important because had Yeshua not been divine, our salvation and atonement would remain in question. To use an illustration, let's suppose I have just finished my 25 ft by 25 ft artistic masterpiece and have locked it away in my studio, and I tell my three year old son that he is not to enter that room. However, he does enter the room and in the process he damages my masterpiece. Upon discovering this, my son is disciplined and is taught that obedience to his parents is beneficial to him and the right thing to do. Fair enough. But, who is going to repair that masterpiece? How is it going to return to the exact same standard that it was prior to its damage? Only the artist would be able to restore it to its original glory. The same is true of our actions against the Father. He has created a masterpiece that we have destroyed and in doing so have marred his reputation, and the only way an infinitely holy God can find someone suitable to repair that infinite damage, is by one who is also infinite - himself. This blessed truth, that it was God with us (Immanuel), who has come down to repair and restore, both humbles us and spurs us on to serve in like manner (Phil 2:5ff).

Yet, some have fallen into the trap of thinking that belief in the divinity of Yeshua is akin to polytheism. Sadly, this view usually goes hand in hand with some downplay or rejection of the Apostolic Scriptures, resulting in majestic verses, such as those found in Colossians, being tossed or rebranded as as nonessential (for example, I'm specifically thinking of those verses which affirm Yeshua as the exact representation of the Father and by whom and through whom all things have come to exist). How this description could reasonably be put forward as something other than a divine one I do not know. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that due to the heavy rabbinical disdain for plurality within the Godhead some within our circles seek to smooth the tension by rejecting Yeshua's divinity. Indeed, one of the major challenges for Jewish people coming to learn of our faith is the concept that Yeshua is entirely divine and entirely human - something we make no apologies for, or more importantly, something the Scripture makes no apology for. On the other extreme, some of our Christian brothers may even see those who do not affirm the Trinity, as stated and formulated by the early church councils, as apostates. Thus we as messianics often

find ourselves somewhere between these two polarized viewpoints, floating off to the side feeling as though we're that weird kid in the schoolyard that nobody is fond of. Yet we must always come back to the central anchor of our faith; the only path to resolving this issue is by a careful exploration of the Scriptures and a willingness to suppress the instinctive desire to know more about God than he has revealed to us.

To this end it must be stated upfront that describing the nature of God is not an easy task and in many ways is impossible for us as finite beings. Indeed, many of the arguments that arise when discussing the deity of Yeshua and his relationship to the Father do so for this very reason, namely, we forget that we are finite and are attempting to speak of the one who is infinite. Moreover, the fact that men and women exist as finite beings demonstrates just how vital the Scriptures are for us to understand and grasp the divinity of Yeshua, for there is no way the finite will come to know the infinite but by the self-revelation of the Infinite One. In other words, had God not decided to reveal his character and name to us, we would not have understood just how far off we were. Thus we trust and rely upon the Scriptures and affirm that they accurately reflect the nature of God. This does not mean that they explain him in his fullness, for this would be impossible as not even the heavens can contain God (2 Chron 2:6), but what they do speak of is both truthful and accurate in every way. For this reason we must begin our investigation by a careful examination of God's revealed word.

First we should start by understanding that the biblical faith is a monotheistic one. The Scriptures present God as the only one who is sovereign over creation; *"Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other."* (Deut 4:39). This is in direct contrast to the beliefs of some of the nations that existed at the time of the Exodus. Many of these nations believed a form of henotheism, namely, a belief in one god for each nation. Such a view may have seen one particular god in relation to others (ie: stronger or weaker), but the concept of one and only one God as fully sovereign over all peoples was not always comprehended by the surrounding nations. The *shema* as found in Deut 6:4 states that Israel were to view God as one. But what does this mean? Should we take this oneness as expressing a collective singular or should we take this to mean 'one' in its most basic form? Some have stated that the Hebrew word אֶחָד , *echad*, is to be understood as a composite unity, which of course opens the door for Yeshua being divine and existing as a part of God. This would be similar to an English speaker referring to a 'bunch of grapes'. The hearer understands that the bunch is made up of smaller individual grapes; nevertheless, it can still be referred to in the singular as a bunch. Scriptural examples of this use are *'and all the people answered with one voice'* (Ex 24:3) and *'and they*

shall become one flesh' (Gen 2:24). The issue with understanding *echad* as a composite unity in our text arises from the context of the verse itself. The context seems to be indicating not so much the nature or makeup of God, but rather that there is no other god other than the God of Israel, and thus *echad* should be understood in its singular sense (as opposed to collective singular). Interestingly, this is also the conclusion of the discussion between the scribe and Yeshua concerning this text - found in Mark 12. In this discussion, Yeshua suggests that the *shema* is the chief commandment and the scribe agrees by quoting Deut 4:35, "To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him". The context of this verse in Deuteronomy shows that Israel was to understand that there is no other god competing with the God of Israel - he is alone in the universe (cf v39). In Mark 12, Yeshua resoundingly affirms the scribe's interpretation of the *shema* and so we should also understand the *shema* in the same light as did the scribe. It is because of God's sovereignty and covenant love toward us that we are to love and obey him, for there is no other. Thus in my view, the *shema* neither affirms nor denies the concept of a plurality within God, for the verse is simply not dealing with the *nature of Adonai*, but rather the *position of Adonai* compared to those outside of himself. In other words, one who denies the deity of Yeshua cannot point to this verse as a justification for a 'non plurality' within the Godhead and one who affirms the plurality of the Godhead cannot point to this verse as a justification for their position either.

The claim that the divinity of Yeshua necessarily implies polytheism is in actuality an assumption about the nature of God. Thus before we can reject or accept Yeshua's claim to divinity, we must first investigate the nature of God. Leaving the *shema* then, we should turn to scriptures that more clearly deal with the nature and plurality of God. The word אֱלֹהִים, *elohim* is used to refer to God as well as the gods of the other nations. In its plural form, this word can emphasize the greatness of God. Thus the plurality of the word in itself doesn't necessitate a plurality within God. However, when *elohim* is described by pronouns and verbs that are in the plural form, it alerts the reader to the fact that there is a plurality within God. An example of this is found in Genesis; "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Gen 1:26-27) It can be seen that God is referring to Himself in the plural forms of the Hebrew, but this is somehow not in contradiction with his singularity as is evidenced by the singular forms included in these verses as well. In addition, within God there is the ability to communicate between at least two beings, which again demonstrates the mark of plurality. So it would seem that this example demonstrates that there exists some form of

plurality within God. Some suggest the plural verbs here are plurals of majesty or respect (for instance the word *elohim* could be considered a plural of respect as the 'im' ending demonstrates a plural form but is used in reference to the one God), however this cannot be as the plural of majesty concerns nouns not verbs ('let *us* make' is the entire verb in Hebrew), moreover, even if a noun in the plural of majesty had a verb associated, it would normally be a singular verb. Another suggestion is that God is referring to the Angelic hosts which is a theory that carries some weight but leaves want for several reasons 1) to see the Angelic hosts here as being referred to breaks the flow of the narrative 'And God said, And God saw it was God, and God blessed', etc. 2) one would be hard pressed to find angels 'creating' anything in the Scriptures or being consulted on such manners (carrying out orders and acting as representatives is more in line with what we find) 3) the singular pronoun suggests mankind was created in God's image where one might have expected the continuation of the plural forms to represent being created in the image of the entire host 4) the special care that God himself personally exhibits with respect to the creation of mankind in chapter 2 is in line with mankind being made in his image alone.

Another example of the plurality of God is found in Genesis 18. There the Lord is described as standing before Abraham on his way to investigate the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. The text suggests that it is God who visits the earth and yet Abraham identifies his general form as that of a man (Gen 18:2, 13, 22). The fact that it was *Adonai* who stood before Abraham is corroborated by the transmission of the text by the Masorets who faithfully copied them. The pointing on the Hebrew word 'Lord' in verse 3 is that which is only reserved for the divine name throughout the Masoretic Text. Where one might expect the spelling to indicate Lord as in 'sir', the spelling actually comes through as referring to אֲדֹנָי *Adonai* (not *adoni* or *sir*). Simply put, the way the Masoretes chose to spell this word indicates that they understood the text to be referring to God himself and not simply 'my master' or the like. Moreover, a scribal 'correction' is made in the Masoretic Text in verse 22 where we read that *Abraham still stood before the Lord*. In actuality, the scribes changed the text to read this way but in the original the text read that the Lord stood before Abraham. This is known because it was recorded in the marginal notes of the Mesorah as one of the *18 Tikkunei Soferim*, 'corrections of the scribes'. The reason for this change is most likely that the Masoretes felt it irreverent for the Lord to be 'standing before' Abraham, as if he needed to serve a mortal, and thus changed it to a more reverent construction. This adjustment indicates that the scribes also felt that the one spoken of in this chapter was the Lord of heaven and earth. For our purposes, this chapter demonstrates that there is a mysterious plurality within God as Abraham speaks face to face with God, yet God himself also declares that no one can see his face and live (Ex

33:20). Moreover, continuing the idea that *Adonai* physically came to earth to investigate the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, the text says that *"the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;"* (Gen 19:24) a curious arrangement indeed, but entirely within the context of the narrative. There are many other examples to be bolstered, but for now it can be seen that a plurality of God is certainly not foreign to the scriptures.

If it is accepted that the scriptures speak of God in plural terms, then the discussion now moves toward demonstrating the deity of Yeshua. One text that foretells of the Messiah's divinity is Isaiah 9:6-7. This is a messianic text and in it the promised child is described as a *"...Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."* These titles are obviously reserved for God alone yet the text tells us that the coming one who will sit on David's throne will enjoy these titles. This implies more than an ordinary earthly heir to the throne as the child is described as the *'Eternal Father'*. Moreover, in Jeremiah 23:5, the branch of David will be called by the name *'Adonai our righteousness'*. In Hebrew the word *אדם shem* (name), is the best equivalent to our English word 'person'. Thus when the text tells us that the messiah will be called by this *name*, it is telling us that the messiah is to be understood in personhood as *Adonai*. Indeed the word *shem* sums up and captures the unique qualities and characteristics of an individual and is thus used appropriately here in Jeremiah (as well as Isaiah). There are many titles and characteristics ascribed to Yeshua that are reserved for deity alone, some of these used by Yeshua himself. A few of these are *'First and Last'* (Rev 2:8 cp Is 41:4), *'I Am'* (John 8:58 cp Ex 3:14), *'my words will not pass away'* (Matt 24:35 cp Is 40:8), *'the shepherd'* (1 Pet 5:4 cp Eze 34:15), *'forgiver of sins'* (Luke 5:21-22 cp Jer 31:34), *'redeemer'* (Titus 2:13-14 cp Psalm 130:7-8), *'Lord of Glory'* (John 17:5 cp Is 42:8), *worshipped* (Mat 14:33, Rev 5). In the end, many more references and arguments can be put forward to show that God is a plurality, alone in the universe, and yet that Yeshua is divine. As mentioned at the outset, many of these difficulties arise when we attempt to discover something about the Almighty that he has not willed to reveal to us. There are few attempts in Scripture to expound upon his nature in the way we westerners demand, yet we are expected to receive both truths simultaneously and unequivocally – on the hand the Father is distinct from the son and on the other in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. God alone created the heavens and the earth, yet the word was with God and was God, and through Yeshua all things were created (John 1:1-3). In him dwells the entire fullness of deity bodily (Col 2:9). Yeshua is the radiance of God's glory and exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb 1:3). In the end one must approach the Scriptures and this topic on the basis of faith; a faith that is secure, mature and spiritually honest. Let us not be determined to bring the

mysteriousness of God down to our low level, but rather be willing to humbly walk before him on the basis of trust in a loving and truthful father.