

Studies on YHWH Part 1: Discovering the Trinity

The Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." "Shema Yisrael, YHWH 'ĕ-lō-hê-nū, YHWH 'e-ḥād"

As you know, we embrace this truth, YHWH is ONE. Yet, we also experience him as something more complex. We believe that YHWH exists as Trinity. God the Father. God the Son. God the Holy Spirit. The Trinity can be difficult for many to understand so let's start with some definitions and affirmations then look at Scripture.

Two Theological Pillars

1. The first is monotheism....now this is monotheism in the sense that there is ONE Creator God, there is ONE God who is sovereign over all other created beings....both heavenly and earthly....Isaiah 43:10, "*You are my witnesses,*" *declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. **Before** me no god was formed, nor shall there be any **after** me."* God is unique, the only one of his kind....ontologically (meaning his being, his essence, his existence) there is NO other being like him. YHWH is utterly unique. As sole creator, there are MANY other beings under him. For example, in creation there are other divine beings, what the bible calls lower-case gods (other elohim), you seem many of them pop up from time to time such as Genesis 6, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 82, the book of Job. Those that are called "false gods" - these are these rebellious elohim that both Moses and Paul call demonic. You see that in Deuteronomy 32:16-17, Leviticus 17:7, Matthew 4:9, 1 Corinthians 8, 1 Timothy 2:5. Other created beings, of course include the heavenly host and obviously there's us, mankind. But NONE of these beings is like YHWH. His alone is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, as well as holy, perfect, good, loving, and just....all these things we worship Him for. That's the first pillar.
2. The second pillar is the topic of our time together today and that's the Trinity. The Trinity itself, of course means "three in one".
 - We aren't saying there are three Gods in one, that's Tritheism.

- We also don't believe that there are three "forms" of God - like how H2O can be both steam, water or ice. That's Modalism, that there are three "modes" of one God.
- We also don't believe that there are three are "parts" or "pieces" of God. That Jesus is 1/3 God, The Father is 1/3 God, and the Spirit makes up the other 1/3. They aren't each 1/3 of God. That's Partialism.
- What we DO believe is that there are three "who's" and one "what" - three persons in one God. So ONE in Essence. Three in Person. Within the one being that is YHWH, God exists as three unique, distinct, eternal, co-equal persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's what we as Christians affirm.

So how do we answer these questions raised earlier? Well let's look at each of these persons in Scripture....

God the Father

The Fatherhood of God isn't debated much, but what does Scripture tell us about the Father?

- The Father is the ultimate source or cause of the universe. We see that in 1 Corinthians 8:6, *"Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist..."* See also Revelation 4:11.
- The Father is also the source and giver of divine revelation . We read in Revelation 1:1, that the Father gives the Son revelation, who then imparts it to us. It reads, *"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John."*
- Our salvation is also a work of the Father, as He sends us his Son. John 3:16-17 says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

It's the Father that initiates all of these things

Matthew 3:16 - Jesus' baptism

Matthew 3:16 does offer clarity that the Father is NOT the Son, that they are distinct. It reads, "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending

like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." That voice from heaven? That's the Father. These are two different persons at this event. Notice, too, that this is one of the passages in Scripture that shows the presence of each member of the Trinity. The Spirit is also here.

YHWH the Son

Where the godhood of the Father is rarely debated, God the Son, though, is very debated. Let's quickly take a look at a few passages that help bring clarity here though.

Fully Human. Fully Divine.

- Colossians 2:8-10, focus on 9. *"The whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"* - Christ is fully human but also fully divine. Common confusion comes in when we use percentages....he's not 100% God and 100% human, scripture doesn't use %. Also can't say he is 50% of both. We would say he is truly God and truly man....it's not that is he "godly" or "humanly" demonstrating parts of those things but by nature he is fully human and fully divine.
- Titus 2:13, also, says this...*"our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...."* Paul says that Jesus is our Great God. In the Greek these two "God and Savior" are both being applied to Jesus (Granville Sharp's rule).
- 2 Peter 1:1, too, equates Jesus as God in the same way Paul does in Titus. *"To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."*

I Am. "Ego Eimi".

John 8:58, is probably the most notable passages regarding Jesus' claim to divinity where he says "before Abraham was, I am." Now in the English it may be a little odd...this "I am" sounds like someone speaking bad English. But keep in mind here this isn't English. This is Greek, "Ego Eimi". And Jesus isn't aiming to be poetic....he's claiming here that he was eternal. In fact, this is a quote from the OT, where we get the actual name of God Himself, YHWH - which means "I am". Exodus 3:14 says, *"God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" This also harkens back to OT statements like Isaiah 43:10 that we read earlier, "You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that **I am***

he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me." In the Greek translation of the Hebrew text, that's the same Greek John uses. He uses it again in John 13:19, *"I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he."* I am. Ego eimi. Also, John 8:24, *"I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."* What's the Jews response to Jesus' claims here of I AM in John 8? Well, they pick up stones to throw at him to kill him!

Alpha and Omega

Fast forward to the end of Scripture though and we read these passages in Revelation....

Revelation 1:4-8, "4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Note verse 8, "I am the Alpha and Omega says Lord God..." Fast forward and you have Jesus himself say in Revelation 22:12-16, "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16 I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." So Jesus says he is the "Alpha and Omega", the grounding of reality, He isn't the first and last creation. This is a claim to deity.

The Image of God

We also see that in Jesus, we see YHWH Himself. Colossians 1:15-17, it says, *"15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or*

dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Also, in John 20:28, we see Thomas recognizing Jesus as God, *"Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!".* This is actually a callback to John 14 where Jesus has this exchange with the disciples.... *8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.* So after Jesus' resurrection, as he appears to the disciples...Thomas is the first to finally recognize and understand this reality....that Jesus is divine.

Keep in mind....The Son is God, but is NOT the Father. The Son does different things than the Father does. We would say that there are different ROLES, which relates to the personhood of each of the Trinity. Also keep in mind that Jesus is God in the flesh. When Jesus went to the cross, GOD was suffering for our sin. When Jesus spoke, GOD spoke. We see God when we see Jesus.

Alright, but how about the third member of the Trinity? He is probably the most misunderstood....

YHWH the Spirit

So not only is the Father, YHWH. Not only is the Son, YHWH. But so is the Spirit. We see God's Spirit at work in creation and bringing life to the world and to us....we don't have time to read all these but we see this truth in Genesis 1:2, 2:7, Psalm 104:29-30. We see it also in the New Testament, as the Spirit brings new life to us, John 3:6-7, 6:63, 2 Corinthians 3:6, and Romans 8:11. All these Scriptures are all there on your handout to review. But we see the Spirit at Work in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament he strived with humanity, convicted us of our sin, he inspired God's people towards holiness, and in many moments throughout history the Spirit actually indwelt certain individuals in order that they obeyed and performed certain tasks under his inspiration. In the New Testament we see Jesus promise that the Helper would come after his departure. Paul teaches us that it is the Spirit that leads us towards righteous living. As we listen and obey the Spirit, we fall in step and model

the kind of life Jesus himself lived. And it's a life that can only be lived empowered by the Spirit.

As we saw in Matthew, notice that the Spirit is separate from Christ and the Father as he is present at the baptism of Jesus, when he descends on Him.

With a name like "the Holy Spirit" it is sometimes hard for us to think of Him as person. In our minds it conjures something ethereal or intangible. But the Spirit is also a person. He has emotions....he can be grieved (Eph 4:30), he can experience joy like we see in the fruits of the Spirit, in the letter written by James we learn he's jealous. The Spirit also has a will and makes decisions. In 1 Cor. 12:4-7 he decides who gets what gifts, and in Acts 13:2, we read this "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Notice those words and phrases that indicate personhood.... "me" ... "I have called them." He also demonstrates intelligence, he teaches us like Jesus promised in John 14:26, he searches uses his own mind to search the things of God (1 Cor 2:10) to teach us. He also relates with us....he has fellowship with believers (1 Cor 13:14). So much so can we related to him that we can lie to him....that's what we see happen with Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5.

So yes, the Spirit is His own person. As with Jesus, though, the Holy Spirit isn't simply a part of the whole. He is fully God. He can be prayed to, worshipped, and obeyed.

Closing

Next week, we'll revisit the Shema, we'll revisit this doctrine of the Trinity....because we have to ask ourselves....as the church is birthed how is it that Jews can so readily accept and believe that Jesus is God when there's the steep tradition that God is **ONE**? Well, it's because that ONE isn't as simple as it sounds. As we've seen this morning yes, God is ONE in essence, but it's complex in that there are three persons involved.

This is actually something the Jews of the second temple were, in fact, already discussing. They had a category for this type of thinking ALREADY, with many holding to a belief at the time called "the two powers in heaven." Because just like you and I, as we will see next week, when we read the Old Testament and we see Christ, so did they see that there are instances where two persons, both considered God, both considered YHWH, seem to be present and existing simultaneously. They themselves had to make sense of those passages and they did, by believing that there were TWO

powers in heaven. In a sense, you could say those Jews were BI-nitarian, just as we are TRInitarian today.

So next week we'll ask ourselves how Jesus was present and at work in the Old Testament.