

RECONTEXTUALIZING THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY
AS FORMULATED BY THE COUNCIL OF NICEA

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Jewish People and God

Atheism

Mention the word, "God," to the average secular Jewish person and most will nod their heads as if to acknowledge some passing acquaintance with whatever notion of God, or none at all. Are there Jewish people who are athiests? This writer has not met that many across the years who would blatantly say, "There is no God!" One might assert, "There is no God," but it would be almost impossible to prove such a statement. If someone should set out to demonstrate that God does not exist, then he or she must question all past generations, future generations, travel to all the corners of the universe and even must explain the experience of every soul who insists that God does exist. God can be quite elusive at times, but the athiest has to take upon himself the burden of making sure that He is not hiding somewhere in some secret corner of the universe.

Agnosticism

Is the Jewish person an agnostic, that is, where he or she neither affirms or denies that God exists. The only reply is that no one has the right to adopt the position of agnosticism until he has actually found God and come to know Him. Most of the time, however, such people are unwilling to take the time and effort to find out that God does indeed exist. The position is simply to cover up an unwillingness to do some honest searching.

Materialism

Is the Jewish person a materialist, where he or she bows at the sacred shrine of science, trusting that everything which one can see and experience can be explained on the basis of simple matter and energy. Some Jewish people have adopted this position and this belief is exemplified by what Bertrand Russell said once, "Man's origin...hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms...blind matter rolls on its relentless way..."¹

But the only problem with this materialistic position is that the universe of matter and energy begs for an answer, how did it come about? How can a blind force operate on matter to produce an orderly universe. There must have been some intelligent mind who could bring into existence a universe of order. Frankly, it takes more faith to believe in a materialistic position where some sense of space-time continuum brings into existence the universe than to posit that God exists and that He is responsible for its existence.

The Religious Jew

The religious Jew does insist that there is a God. The religious in Israel are locked in a bitter struggle in an attempt to demonstrate to the secular Jew that He indeed exists and that He is alive and well. A great deal of effort is taken to invite secular Jews to Friday meetings, Sabbath services, dinners, all for the purpose of trying to convince some Jewish people that God is really there after all.

The question however arises on what and who is God according to the

¹ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship" in *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Norton, 1981), page

rabbis. We are dependent on how they have handled the texts which relate to God's presence and His work.

The Involvement in the Deanthropomorphizing of God

One aspect of interpreting the texts has been the issue of deanthropomorphizing God, that is, how can we speak of God, His hands, eyes, ear, mouth, face, and so on. Already, by the 400s B.C.E., the religious leaders wanted to protect the high and lofty character of Israel's calling by their God. Specifically, the people of Judea must never confuse their God with the pagan deities of the nations in the Middle East. The Babylonian exile was a national trauma affecting the people of Judea and one of the main designs of God's providence was to purify a remnant among Israel who would never place their God on the same level as other pagan deities (Micah 4: 9, 10). Therefore, the post-exilic leaders and writers began and continued a process that emphasized God's transcendence. It remains now to quickly access how the rabbis went about interpreting the Biblical texts as to how best understand who God is.

Memra

In the Targumim² the term memra, or "word" is prominent as the manifestation of divine power and also serves as the messenger of God on His behalf.

Memra is an interesting concept in early Jewish thought. The intermediate agency between God and man was commonly held to be memra and was the

² The Aramaic translation of the first five books of Moses and the paraphrase of the prophetic portion of the Hebrew Scriptures required for those who returned from Babylonian and for successive generations in Israel who primarily spoke Aramaic.

means of revelation of God to man. The etymology of the word is given by Jastrow as "memra," 1) word, command, or 2) hypostatized, the Word, i.e., the LORD used in the Targum to obviate anthropomorphism...³

Some examples of this term follow: 1) the biblical Deut. 1:32, "you did not trust the LORD your God" is seen in the Targum as "you have not believed in the (memra) of the Lord;"⁴ 2) it was the memra who plagued the people" (Targum Yerushalmi for Ex. 32:35)⁵, instead of the biblical, "the LORD smote the people;" 3) instead of "I will cover you with my hand," (Ex. 33:22), the Targum says that "I will cover yo with my memra;" 4) it is the memra which goes before Cyrus (Targum Isa. 45:2)⁶ instead of the biblical, "I will go before you;" 5) it is against the memra who men offend instead of God Himself as seen in the Scriptures (Ex. 16:8).

The memra is regarded as the manifestation of God. Targum Yerushalmi for Deut. 4:7 says that "The memra brings Israel nigh to God and sits on His throne receiving the prayers of Israel."⁷ The memra is the one who guards Jacob (Gen. 28:20-21; 35:3) and Israel (Ex. 12:28-29), and so on. The memra is also

³ M. Jastrow, Dictionary of the Targumim, Vol. 2 (New York: Title Publishing Co., 1943), p. 775.

⁴ All citations from the Targum on the Pentateuch are from J.W. Etheridge, tr., The Targums of Omkelos and Jonathan - ben Uzziel, 2 Vols. (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1865) except where otherwise noted.

⁵ K. Kohler, "Memra," in The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. VIII (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), p. 465, citing the Targum Yerushalmi. Several Targumim are identified for the Torah (Pentateuch): 1) Onkeles, 2) Palestinian Targum, and 3) the Yerushalmi, probably some offshoot of the Palestinian Targum.

⁶ J.F. Stenning, tr., The Targum of Isaiah (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), based on the Targum of the Prophets, primarily Jonathan ben Uzziel.

⁷ K. Kohler, Op. Cit.

regarded as the agent of God, e.g., in the creation of the earth (Isa. 45:12)⁸ and that He is the one who executes justice (Targum Yerushalmi for Num. 33:4)⁹ The memra is even regarded as the comforter in the future: "So shall my memra comfort you" (Targum Isa. 66:13).¹⁰

Texts like this can be multiplied over and over. The problem at hand now is just how did the Jewish scholars understand the term memra by the first century C.E. G.E. Moore comments on this understanding: "Nowhere in the Targums is memra a "being" of any kind or in any sense, much less a personal being. The appearance of personality which in some places attaches to the word is due solely to the fact the memra of the LORD and similar phrases and reverent circumlocutions for 'God', introduced precisely where in the original God is personally active in the affairs of men." ¹¹

In addition, Moore states that "the memra is purely a phenomenon of translation, not a figment of speculation; it never gets outside the Targums." ¹² H.A. Wolfson echoes the same sentiments: "No scholar nowadays will entertain the view that it (memra) is either a real being or an intermediary." ¹³

Obviously, both from the Jewish point of view of the first century as well as modern commentators, the use of memra was intended as a means to deanthropomorphize the way people understand and talk about God. This became the

⁸ J.F. Stenning, Op. Cit.

⁹ K. Kohler, Op. Cit.

¹⁰ J.F. Stenning, Op. Cit.

¹¹ G.E. Moore, Judaism, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), page 419.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ H.A. Wolfson, Philo, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 287.

means so as to protect the transcendancy of Israel's God compared to the deities of other nations.

Shekinah

Another means to obviate anthropomorphic expressions was the use of Shekinah, which was a way of describing the presence of God, but at the same time avoiding any anthropomorphic means to speak of God as directly relating to people. This word appears many times in the Targumim as well as in other mainstream Jewish literature.

The Targum Onkelos ¹⁴ uses this expression in interesting ways: For example, "The LORD is not in your midst (Num. 14:42) is rendered, "The Shekinah is not in your midst." The verse, "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Ex. 33:20) is given as "You cannot see the face of my Shekinah." Of Deut. 12:5, where one reads, "To put his Name there," Onkelos renders it as "To rest his Shekinah there."

Other Procedures

The Targumim paraphrasers (meturgemanim) also had a reverent way of speaking about God and His activities. When describing His relationship with the world, God is never made the direct subject or object of an action. Active words in the biblical text were handled in the passive so as to avoid undue anthropomorphic expression. McNamara points out this technique in a number of

¹⁴ Reputed to be the author, that is, the one to start to put the Targum into writing, a Targum on the first five books which had been carried orally to the end of the first and beginning of the second centuries.

examples from a Targum known as Neofiti:¹⁵ 1) Gen. 1:4 is rendered, "and it was manifest before the Lord that the light was good;" 2) instead of "God heard their groaning" (Ex. 2:4), the Targum reads, "and their complaint was heard before the Lord;" 3) concerning Ex. 2:25, "God saw the people of Israel and God took notice of them," the paraphrasers provided it as "the servants of the sons of Israel were manifest before the Lord." Many more examples can be provided but the point is that God must not be brought into any direct contact whatsoever with man. The phrase "before the LORD," was chosen to avoid false impression among the unlearned and every care was exercised to render Biblical materials so as to prevent the identification of the God of Israel with the pagan deities.

Names of God

While Jewish literature after the first century C.E. abounded with various suggestions for the names of God, yet by the first century specific names were also used so as to carefully protect the being of God from contact with His creation, including that of man.

One quite prominent name is "heaven," found quite often in a number of compound expressions, e.g., "fear of heaven," which approximates the biblical "fear of the LORD." Besides the numerous places this word appears in the traditional literature, one may also note its presence in the Gospels (Matt.

¹⁵ M. McNamara, Targum and Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 102, 104. The author provides a citation from the Neofiti manuscript (The Palestinian Targum) describing the work of creation: "The earth was void and empty and darkness was spread over the face of the abyss. And the Word (Memra) was the light and it shone ... and he called it the first night ... If the Word (Memra) of the Lord shone at creation, this can only be because it was the light. It is identified with primordial light ... This is precisely what John in his prologue to the Gospel says of the Logos. 'In the beginning was the word ... and the word was God. In him was light and the light shines in darkness' (John 1:1-3). And like the Targumnist, John was speaking of the activity of the Logos at creation. He was then light, and this light still shines in Christ."

21:25; Mk. 11:30; Luke 15:18,21). Matthew often uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven," which is a periphrastic phrase for kingdom of God.

Still another substitute name for God is "power," found not infrequently in the rabbinic literature. One particular phrase associated with this name is what Yeshua used to describe His uniqueness when asked by the high priest if He was the son of the blessed one: "You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of "power" (Matt. 26:64). The term, "power" is seen as a circumlocution for that of "God."

The Implications of Deanthropomorphizing God

What does all this exercise of deanthropomorphizing of God mean by the time of a first century Judaism? One observation becomes quite clear: While God certainly can be regarded as personal, yet He became in another way, far removed from the average Jewish person. A warm living vital relationship was lost in comparison with how the prophets spoke of God. God had become a "wholly other being."

This trend was to also have a devastating influence on an understanding of the Messiah. The deanthropomorphizing process created a great gulf between God and man, and therefore, it would not be possible to think in terms of a human Messiah, who is at the same time, divine. Divinity cannot be entangled with humanity. Israel's God was not an idol like that of any other nation. Can we perhaps grasp the problem now for the first century Jew? Yeshua can be a Messiah, even superhuman, but not divine. The development of a Jewish religious tradition had schooled the nation to its own particular concept of Messiah as human only.

Subsequent to the first century, the deanthropomorphizing process

continued, and particularly in the works of Saadya Gaon and Maimonides, the effort was carried to its ultimate peak. In particular, the latter teacher, declared that God cannot be in direct contact with this world at all. To undergird his assertion, he formulated what he called the doctrine of the double negative where, instead of being able to say, "God loves any person," the statement must be: "God is in a state of non-loving someone." The Rambam had put such an accent on the oneness of God, it is therefore impossible for Him to be in direct contact with this world and or anything or anyone in this world.¹⁶ One of the aspects by which Maimonides could say men can know Him is to "imitate His ways in the pursuit of loving-kindness and justice" on earth.¹⁷

In the second of the 13 principles of faith as stated by Maimonides, he confidently asserts that, "I believe that God, blessed be His name, is a Unity, unlike any other unity in the universe."¹⁸ The Rambam was a philosopher of the highest order and had a number of reasons for referring to God as *yahid*, but in the sense which we have just discussed, God is absolute one, the only one, completely separate from His creation.

Therefore, when the Messianic Jew wishes to share his faith with the religious Jew concerning who God is, the latter does not see the biblical texts as the former; rather, the religious Jew sees these very texts through the eyes of what the rabbis have done with the texts concerning the existence of God, who He is and what He does.

¹⁶ Louis Goldberg, Some Observations Concerning the Attributes of God om Jewish Philosophy, unpublished M.A. thesis, Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL.

¹⁷ Isadore Epstein. Judaism (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1959), p. 212.

The Messianic Jewish position in the New Covenant

Messianic Jews who wrote the New Testament did not set out to provide a theological-philosophical understanding of who God is. Rather, they began with the proclamation that God is one, as we shall soon see. But, in addition, once they became apprised of the claims of Yeshua, they asserted in simple statements, as exemplified by Kefa (Peter), "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (Matt 16:16). Yeshua commended Kefa for his statement declaring, "Blessed are you, Shimon bar Yonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). But it is interesting to see how each of them dealt with the basic doctrine of God in simple and succinct, but profound statements. Some of the Biblical theological position is presented as follows:

1. The New Covenant doctrine of God is based squarely on what the Tenach declared concerning God's unity.

Mark 12:28, 29: "One of the teachers of the Law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Yeshua had given them a good answer, he asked them, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

'The most important one,' answered Yeshua, 'is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"

The proclamation concerning the doctrine of God as formulated by the Messianic Jews who wrote the New Covenant started with the emphasis on the unity and not the peculiar nature of the Godhead, as will be explored below. Why is this? Only because Israel had a revelation from God that He is one in the midst of the polytheism of the surrounding nations. Furthermore, we have to remember the Jewish background and environment upon which Messianic Jews reflected. The belief was in the unity of God and in fact, this unity is their fixed star in theology.

2. In the New Covenant explanation of who God is, three persons are mentioned, and each one is recognized as God by the Messianic Jews:

Yohanan 6:27: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval."

One person therefore is called, "the Father."

Hebrews 1:8: "But about the Son He says,
'Your throne, oh God will last forever and ever,
and righteousness will be the scepter of Your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, Your God, has set You above
Your companions
by anointing You with the oil of joy.'"

The second person referred to is called, "the Son," and also called, "O God."

Acts 5:3,4: "... Ananias, how is it that God has so filled your heart that have lied to the Holy Spirit? ... You have not lied to men but to God."

The third person is called, "the Holy Spirit," but He is also referred to as God.

3. Each of these three persons is clearly distinguished from the other two.

Some might argue that we are merely referring to one person with three names. But this is not the case at all. Note some passages where these three distinct persons are mentioned together.

Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God."

John 14: 16: "And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- ..."

But note that the Counselor the *Paraclete*, is designated, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14: 26).

John 15:26: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me."

In certain passages, all three persons appear together.

Matt. 3:16, 17: "As soon as Yeshua was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is My Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased.'"

There is no question therefore regarding the intent of the writers to indicate, not only three distinct persons, but also that each are God.

4. These three persons are sent forth as one God, not three Gods.

(1) John 10: 30: "I and the Father are one."

While some will claim the statement only expresses the oneness of purpose of the Father and the Messiah as they work together, but more than just purpose is intended. Why then, if only purpose is the objective, would Jewish people on this occasion pick up stones to throw at Yeshua? Exactly because they perceived that Yeshua said he was on the same level as God, on a par with Him.

(2) The Father and the Spirit are one

I Cor 3:16: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you."

There is no doubt that the intent by Paul here was to indicate two persons, the Father and the Spirit, but there is also the implication that the Holy Spirit is God, and therefore, only one God is in mind. One also has to consider that the writer, Paul, prior to his salvation experience, would never have uttered such words. The proclamations by the Messianic Jews were an anathema to him and only a Damascus road experience with Yeshua as Lord in response to his cry would ever change his mind and heart.

(3) The Son and the Spirit are one

Rom 8:9: "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of the Messiah, he does not belong to the Messiah."

(4) The Father, Son and Spirit are one, again not just one in purpose but, three persons are presented as God, but that only one God is in reality present:

Yohanan 14:16, 18, 23: "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - ... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you ... My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

5. These three persons are equal in being, power and glory.

(1) Each of these persons is called God as we have already noted

(2) These three persons are associated together in a way that is not consistent with inequality. In a final proclamation to the messengers of the New Covenant, Yeshua declared:

Mattai 28:19: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And again, Paul also states:

II Cor 13:14: "May the grace of the Lord Yeshua HaMashiah, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

(3) There is no fixed numerical order in the association of these persons. Rav Shaul (Paul) never sought to establish any order, and neither did Kefa or Yehudah (Jude):

II Thess 2:13, 14: "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through His sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our Gospel, so that you might share in the glory of our Lord Yeshua HaMashiah."

Eph 4: 4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Note also the following passages: I Cor. 12:4-6; Eph. 5:18-20; I Pet. 1:2, 3; Yehudah 20, 21.

(4) The names, "Son of God," and "Spirit of God" do not imply any inequality at all. Perhaps it might seem to be to the superficial reader. The Son, however, is not derived from the Father; while we may see Him as the Son of Man in his humanity, but the designation does not indicate any inequality with the Father. In a peculiar sense, Yeshua has two natures, human and divine, but He is one person. Perhaps in His office, He carried out the wishes of the Father, but in His very deity, there is an equality with God.¹⁹

Yohanan 5:18: "For this reason the Judeans tried all the harder to kill Him: not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God."

Obviously, this was no Jewish idea that God is anything more than just a mere one person. The Jewish position in the first century was that God is the lone God and not what Yohanan intends to convey through his statements.

(5) The Son possesses equal power and deserves equal honor with the Father

Yohanan 5:21,23: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it ... that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him."

The very obvious implication is that each have equal power and must

¹⁹ Yeshua took the title, "Son of Man" for a specific reason so as to then demonstrate he is a human being but then he proceeded to do the works which only God can do (Matt. chapters 8, 9) and therefore we note that the person of Yeshua is a mystery.

therefore be recognized for who they are.

6. There exists certain distinctions of priority and subordination among the three persons, but these concern their respective functions.

The principle observation with this statement is the concern as to what these three persons do, but not who they are.

- (1) In the work of the peculiar of who God is, Father is mentioned first, the Son is second, while the Spirit third. Note the various prepositions which are used:

I Cor 8:6: "There is *but* one God the Father, from (*ek*, the source)... one Lord, Yeshua HaMashiah, through (*dia*, channel) whom are all things...

and turning now also to

Eph 2:18: "...we both have our access by (*en*, the agent) to (*pros*, the goal) the Father."

The prepositions are extremely important to indicate the functions of these three persons, but we are still only talking about one God

- (2) In the work among the persons of the Godhead, the peculiar being who is God, the Son in the work is subordinate, and the Spirit to the Father and the Son:

I Yohanan 4:10: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Yohanan 14:26: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you ..."

Yohanan 15:26: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."

Note how in the first Scripture passage, the Father sends the Son, in the second, the Father sends the Holy Spirit, while in the third, the Son sends the Holy

Spirit. Even here, the subordination is voluntary and not necessary in the sense that each one was commanded to serve. The well known passage describing the *kenosis* of the Son is that He was subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit as man, living under the direction of God and the Holy Spirit. God is a God of order and each specific act is spelled out as to what the different persons did, but once more, the Jewish writers of the New Covenant never intended to imply that the Son and the Spirit was subordinate in every aspect of their being; rather, while there is a oneness in the peculiar being of God, yet each person had His function to accomplish.

All of these statements are proclamations of the infinite mystery of who God is. Jewish writers of the New Covenant were not inclined to get into any rationalistic explanations of this mystery or provide a philosophic understanding of how God can be one and yet three persons in the one God. That became the work of the Gentile believers, who had been trained in Greek philosophy, Plato and Aristotle and they proceeded to outline their beliefs in their particular contextualizing as we shall note.

The Definition By the Council of Nicea

It was necessary for the Gentile believers to contextualize their faith in a cultural setting most familiar to them, which was a Greek philosophical one, rather than leaving it to the proclamation by the New Covenant writers as they tried to communicate from with a Jewish mindset. Already, by the third Century, a number of problems had arisen as how to understand this mystery of God's being, and so finally, the Bishops of the churches were called together to the Council in Nicea in 325 by Emperor Constantine to formulate a specific statement who God is and what is the respective position of the Son and the Holy

Spirit in relationship to the Father.

The bare statements of the first major decision by this Council is only presented here in its bare outline form:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father: by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary ...²⁰

This statement as revised further by the Constantinople revision in 381 C.E., reflects much of what most conservative Bishops considered necessary in their attempt to protect the deity of Jesus. In particular, the phrase, being of one substance, *homoousia*, insists that the Messiah is of the same substance as the Father, and was a deliberate proclamation intended to allay any suspicion that at a certain previous time, the Messiah was not, and that He was not equal to God in His very being.

The Arians, who felt that at a certain time in the past, Jesus was not, hated the expression *homoousios* and declared it to be unscriptural, but the word itself, was intended to "establish the doctrine of the true deity of the Son."²¹

While such a formulation satisfied the Greek philosophically-trained

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 1169.

²¹ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, III (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950) pg 629.

Bishops, which then in turn became the formulation of the triunity of God, was fine for these brethren and the Church which came after them. Would this formulation of who God is satisfy when attempting to present it to the Jewish community? Certainly, the Jewish community would take a stand against the Nicean creed; the rabbis had already insisted in their pronouncements that God is only one, while the triunity very carefully spells out that there is but one God but three persons with that Godhead.

Specifically, however, three statements came out of the Nicene conclave which would create an ever widening breach between the Jewish community and the Church. We shall note briefly these concerns:

1) Pesach, or Easter

The Council, aside from its philosophical-theological pronouncement of who God is, also decreed that no church should henceforth celebrate the Passover and through it, proclaim the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Rather, the churches must recognize and focus in on Easter, to be celebrated on the first day of the week, in honor of Jesus' resurrection on that day. Yes, on the previous Friday, his death would be commemorated, but the non-Jewish bishops wanted a calendar year which served their interests rather than following the Jewish calendar. Therefore, a totally different means for calculating Easter was enacted, different from Passover.

2) Shabbat-Sunday

The Council also insisted that the churches not meet on the Jewish Sabbath day so as to not be confused with the synagogue. Again, taking a bold step, they set in motion an edict that all worship must be on the first day of the week, again,

to commemorate the day on which Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

These two practices alone set in motion a lifestyle would serve to widen a lifestyle for the churches. A number of churches still recognized the Jewish roots of their faith, celebrated the Passover and met on Shabbat, but from then on, no freedom was permitted to blend truths from the Messianic Jewish community. The church was now to be separate from the Jewish community; the Messianic Jews was caught in the middle and would either have to submit and do what the non-Jewish church was doing, or be considered outside, and therefore heretics. Bagatti comments on this lack of the exercise of freedom of choice, as long as a biblical base for the Gospel was upheld, "this divergence ... did have enough influence to bring about a great division of souls."²²

3) An AntiJewish Emperor

Constantine had called the Council into session, inviting the Bishops to attend, and when it was over, he wrote a letter to those who were not able to attend. The epistle was no love letter; it really expressed a virulent antiJewishness and such a statement from the most prominent leader of the empire only served to not only breed hatred for the Jew, even among so-called Christians. The Messianic Jews were caught in the cross fire although they continued their witness to their brethren. But their influence was waning, separated from the official church and with the Council's statements, the Jewish community would see them as traitors

²² B. Bagatti, The Church from the Circumcision (Jerusalem : Franciscan Printing Press, 1971), p. 93. Bagatti also points out that eighteen Jewish bishops were present in the land of Israel of which the Gentile Bishops had no knowledge of their existence. If they had been present at the Council of Nicea, one can only wonder if some freedom of choice could have been allowed the Jewish brethren, as long as they adhered to a sound interpretation of the Word.

At the best, we can only say that the formulation of Nicea can only serve the interests of Gentile believers, but it cannot serve the interests of Messianic Jewish people today in their witness to the Jewish community. What is needed is to develop a lifestyle more compatible with the Jewish community, but even more important, we recontextualize the theological pronouncements begun by Nicea. For the interests of this paper, we need to turn our attention to another possibility by which we can deal with the Hebrew texts that will help in proclaiming something about the peculiar nature of who God is.

The Mosaic Affirmation of God as Ehad

While Israel's Confession in Deuteronomy 6:4 is an affirmation that God is one, is there a possibility whereby the word, '*ehad*', suggests something other than an absolute one, or only one. Again, as we have noted, the Tenach is not a happy hunting ground by which we can prove God is three in one in many passages but, if words have any meaning, can we determine from the usage of '*ehad*' a possibility that would lend itself to a recontextualization of an understanding of who God is from within the Tenach. Our search then, is to see how the word '*ehad*' is used. Hundreds of usages of this word appears in the Tenach, emphasizing that it means "only one," but a handful of passages suggests something other than just "one;"

Genesis 11: 6: "The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.'"

The use of "one" is in a collective use, referring to all the people involved in building the tower, but considered as one.

Genesis 32:8: "He thought, 'if Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.'"

The reference to "one group," refers again, collectively, to an

unspecified number of people.

Genesis 41: 25, 26: "Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do ... It is one and the same dream.'

Once more, the reference to "one" actually refers to two dreams which Pharaoh had. But once more, the word "one," is used in a collective sense.

Exodus 30: 2: "It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high -- its horns of one piece with it."

The use of "one" refers to the fact that the altar is made of one material, acacia wood, but actually the texts speaks of two horns made of the one material. The possibility is again of a collective use of "one."

Numbers 13:23: "When they reached the valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single "cluster" of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs."

Once again, the text adds the word, "cluster," for the Hebrew word, *'ehad*, to make sense, because it would be ridiculous to translate that two men were carrying "one" grape slung on a line connecting two poles; no, the men were carrying a cluster or who knows how many were grapes were present. Once again, the word, "one" is used in a collective sense.

Gen 2:24: "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

The use of "one" referring to the flesh suggests that it takes both a father and a mother together in the marriage relationship to produce a child. The child then, one flesh, reflects the two involved in its creation.

What can we affirm regarding Ehad?

Can a few appearances of *'ehad* that demonstrate a use of "one" in a collective sense enable us to confidently assert that in Israel's great confession: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4), the word *'ehad* also

represents some collective reference to the very being in God? This writer would hesitate to affirm such a statement based on the few usages of 'ehad. The rabbis could very easily demonstrate that from their hermeneutics, the Confession stresses that God is only one and that 'ehad just that.

However, what can we say against the possibility of 'ehad referring to God in a collective sense? Here, we are on more firm ground because, even in the Tanach, a profound mystery concerning who God is without going into much detail. A few Scripture passages seem to suggest the mystery whereby one can understand the very being of God in a collective sense of more than one person, and at least three are indicated that should warrant serious consideration.

1. Exodus 23:20, 21: "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him."

Even from the Jewish point of view, this passage has always been a mystery. Rashi suggests, "Our rabbis said that he (the angel) is Mattatron...whose name is even as the name of His Master, for Mattatron has the numerical value (314) of Shaddai, "the Almighty" (Sanhedrin 38b).²³

But who is this mysterious Metatron? An interesting discussion between a portion of Sanhedrin where Minim witnessed to leaders in the Jewish community included one encounter:²⁴

"Once a Min said to R. Idith, It is written, "And unto Moses He said, *Come up unto me!* - It was Metatron [who said that], he replied, For my name is in him (Ex. 23:11). But if so, [he retorted,] we should worship him! The same passage, however, - replied R. Idith - says: *Be not rebellious against him*, i.e.,

²³ Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary, Rev. M. Rosenbaum & Dr. A. M. Silbermann, tr. (London: Shapiro, Vallentine, 1930), page 126

²⁴ Sanhedrin 38b in Nezikim III, Jacob Schachter, tr. and annotator, Babylonian Talmud (London: Soncino, 1935), Isadore Epstein, ed., pp. 246, 246.

exchange Me not for Him. But if so, (that he is not to be worshipped but God alone) why is it stated: *He will not pardon your transgressions?* He answered: By our troth (lit., we hold the belief) we should not accept him as a messenger, (of forgiveness) for it is written, *and he said to him, If thy personal presence go not* (Ex. 33:15) ... Metatron not accepted as a second god, he is only a guide"!

Scholem provides a further discussion on this mysterious word, Metatron, indicating that various ideas appear in the Talmud and Karaite literature which wrestle with some kind of mysterious assertions. He is the only one who is seated in the presence of God as a heavenly scribe, recording the good deeds of Israel. But the question is raised as to why the special name, YHWH, is in him. In the Karaite literature, specifically by Kirkisana, he is regarded as the lesser YHWH, but this version has been rejected by Israel's teachers. The major opinion against regarding him as deity is that no one wanted to regard this mysterious person as another deity. Could this observation be turned aside because of the deanthropomorphization of God? And yet, the Karaites appeared to recognize this "angel" as someone special. Metatron remains an enigma for the Jewish community to this day.²⁵

2. Proverbs 30:4: "Who has gone up to heaven and come down?
 Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of His hands?
 Who has wrapped up the waters in His cloak?
 Who has established all the ends of the earth?
 What is His name, and the name of His son ..."

In a chapter replete with riddles, Agur comes up with one of the most mysterious enigma of all. But what do the Jewish commentators have to say regarding this passage? One popular response has been:²⁶

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| "30:4a | Refers to Moses |
| 30:4b | Refers to Aaron |
| 30:4c | Referring to Elijah's act |
| 30:4d | Father Abraham |
| 30:4e | What is his name, referring to the Lord, the Warrior - Lord is his name (Ex. 15:3) |
| 40:4f | and the name of his son, of Israel, as it is said, Israel is my first born son (Ex. 4:22). |

²⁵ Gersham Scholem, "Metatron" in Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 11 New York: MacMillan, 1971), p.

²⁶ Burton L. Visotzky, tr., & annotator, The Midrash on Proverbs (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), in Yale Judaica Series, Vol. XXVII.

Rosenberg follows Rashi in his interpretation,²⁷ who indicated that Proverbs 30:4 refers to Moses ... 30:4e and f, again Rashi who explains it as a poetic device, "If there was anyone like him, tell me his name, or, if you have forgotten his name, tell me his son's name, if you know there was ever one like him. But again, because of the strong emphasis that God is only one, the interpretation of the Proverbs passage would not yield any mysterious enigma to it

3. Micah 5: 2 (5:1 Tanach):

"But you, Bethlehem Ephratha,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you shall come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."

The phrase, "origins" is literally in Hebrew, "goings out" or, could also be existence. The point is that the Hebrew terms behind, "ancient times," is actually: "day of eternity." Here indeed is a mystery: Someone born in Bethlehem, the Messiah who will come to rule Israel, but who has always existed from eternity. Once more, we are confronted by some serious questions as how to understand who God might be. Only He exists from eternity, but now the suggestion is that the Messiah is also from eternity.

Not too many other highly suggestive Scripture passages are present from where we can draw that deal with the mystery to who God is, even though suggestions have been made before to demonstrate the plurality of persons in one God. We need to be careful, however, that we do not read a New Covenant theology back into the Hebrew Scriptures if it is not readily apparent from the passage in itself. For example, in examining Genesis 3:15, some have felt that it is

²⁷ Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg, Proverbs with English Translation (New York: Judaica Press, 1988), pp. 188, 189.

"obvious" that the "seed of the woman" is the Messiah. But can we confidently assert this is so, if the New Testament had not been in place. Similarly, one cannot turn to Genesis 1:1 and claim that the term, "Elohim" (with its plural ending) is an obvious reference to the three persons in the one God in the Hebrew Bible. Again, such an understanding is only readily apparent from the revelation of the Messiah in the New Covenant. On the other hand, we can learn from what the rabbis asserted that Elohim can describe the majesty of God. Even Girdlestone admits that the plurality of Elohim can also express the majesty and authority of God.²⁸

One must, therefore, be careful while exegeting Scripture that we do not make the Hebrew Scriptures say more than they actually say, although with the New Covenant revelation, we do have a fuller description of who God is.

4. The term, *yahid*.

This word means absolute one, only one, illustrated by God's use of it when He called upon Abraham, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering ..." (Genesis 22:2). When God said, "your only son," the word *yahid* is used to describe Isaac that he was in reality the only covenant son of Abraham.

We had already noted that Maimonides used this very word to describe who God is, *only one*, with no possibility of what *'ehad* might suggest, a composite unity. Obviously, Maimonides primary intention was to deny any claim for Yeshua's deity; no Jewish person could rightfully accept it, but this was a conclusion already drawn from centuries of deanthropomorphization of God.

²⁸ Robert Girdlestone, Synonyms of the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint of 1897 edition), p. 22.

However, nowhere in the Tenach is God ever referred to as *yahid*. reference had already made in a footnote concerning this writer's M.A. thesis on the attributes of God and the theory of the double negatives as propounded by Maimonides. The thesis was written in a secular institution and the writer was not able to express a particularly religious point of view but deal only with Maimonides from the philosophic and historical points of view and how various Jewish writers agreed or disagreed with him. Had this writer the opportunity to add one final chapter to his thesis, he would have asserted strongly that the God of Maimonides is not the God of the Tanach, exactly because nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures is God ever referred to by *yahid*, but instead *'ehad*.

What can we therefore assert? It seems that the usage of *'ehad* in its collective sense, based on a few other strong passages from the Tanach, does seem to suggest the concept of God as a composite being, one God, but in a mystery, more than one person within the Godhead. Furthermore, for us as Messianic Jews, the abundant revelation of the New Covenant expands what is hinted at in the Tanach and therefore, we can speak of God as composite unity.

Some Messianic Jews have sought to ingratiate themselves with the Jewish community and have spoken of God as simply a Unity. However, to this writer, this accommodates too much to the Jewish position of how to understand God as interpreted by the rabbis and therefore gives away what the Scriptures would assert. We must give a strong positive witness that God be considered as a composite unity thereby allowing for the possibility of the persons within the Godhead but yet at the same time, insisting that God is one. In that way, we have recontextualized the doctrine of God from that of Nicea and dealt primarily with what the Hebrew texts have to say, and at the same time, also considering what the Messianic Jews of the first century asserted regarding who God is.