

## Tri-Unity of God

It is important to recognize that the doctrine of the tri-unity of God was actually developed in the New Testament following the incarnation of the Messiah. It was formulated by the reflection of church theologians over many generations following the completion of the New Testament. One must be patient with Jewish people if they have extreme difficulty in seeing this truth. Generations of misunderstanding on their part regarding the supposed "tri-theism" of Christianity is hard to break through.

While recognizing that the "tri-unity of God" is clearly stated only in the New Testament, it should also be expected that this doctrine is anticipated in the Hebrew Scriptures. Upon close inspection, it is not only anticipated, but it is stated, although not in the theological formulations of later church fathers.

What needs to be stressed is that there are indications in the Hebrew Scriptures that, although the nature of God is a unity, unity is shared by a plurality of personalities. No one "indication" is sufficient by itself to formulate the doctrine of the "tri-unity." The argument for tri-unity is a cumulative one and all indications must be taken together.

Individual arguments such as the plural ending of "elohim" and the use of plural pronouns by the Deity are not sufficient alone to prove the doctrine, but are consistent with the doctrine as it was developed later in progressive revelation.

Although the information may not be as abundant as we might hope, it is far more than the average Jewish person ever would recognize apart from close study. The following is a summary of the facts taught in the Hebrew Bible that support the idea of a plurality in the Godhead and the possibility of Deity manifesting Himself in human form.

### Genesis 1:1

The word "God"

1. The singular form ("eloah") appears around 250 times.
2. The plural form ("elohim") is used around 2,500 times.
  - a) sometimes used of judges - Exodus 21:5-6
  - b) sometimes used of angels - Psalm 8:5
  - c) sometimes used of men - Psalm 82:6

In the vast majority of the occurrences of elohim with a verb, the singular form of the verb is used:

Genesis 1:1	bereshit	bara (sing.)	elohim (plural)
	"in the beginning	created	God"

There are times when a plural verb is used with elohim when referring to the true God:

Gen. 20:13; 35:7; 2 Samuel 7:23; Psalm 58:11

The plural form is used both of the true God and of false "gods." Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 13:2

### Genesis 1:26

Genesis 3:22; 11:6-7; Isaiah 6:8

It is always helpful to illustrate a concept so one might better understand it. With the Tri-unity of God this is not an easy task. I have heard a number of illustrations offered to help understand the nature of God. In my opinion all, with the exception of the following, are greatly lacking in helping to communicate this truth. I offer the following because I believe it is based on the Word of God, although I realize some may not agree with the use of any illustration for the Tri-unity of God, even this one.

<b>Genesis 1:1</b>	<b>Romans 1:20</b>
<b>UNIVERSE</b>	
<b>(Beginning) Time</b>	<b>(Earth) Matter</b>
<b>Past/Present/Future</b>	<b>Solid/Liquid/Gas Energy / Motion / Phenomena</b>
<b>(Heavens) Space</b>	
<b>Height/Width/Depth</b>	

The Scriptures were revealed to us progressively. God did not drop a completed book out of heaven for us. The Bible was written over a period of approximately 1500 years. As more of the Word of God was revealed we learned more on any given subject. This is true with the nature of God.

It is expected that the Hebrew Scriptures would begin to unfold for us the nature of God. An examination of it reveals exactly that. Yet, what is most often revealed about the nature of God, or implied, is that He is a plurality in unity. In a few passages of the Hebrew Scriptures, but most clearly in the New Testament, we find that plurality to be a Tri-unity.

The following method has proven to be effective in dealing with Jewish people, and those involved in cults, that don't believe in the Tri-unity. I will "walk" the individual through each verse asking him to identify the individuals. This helps the person to see the concept that I am trying to communicate and, more importantly, what the Scriptures teach. The verses that are used are not exhaustive on the subject. When you understand the concept I am trying to communicate, you can fit additional verses as you desire into your presentation. You also might find it more comfortable to present this truth in a different order. Use whatever order or verses you feel comfortable with in sharing this truth.

Lesson 1 primarily looked at Genesis 1. This is where I begin as I introduce the nature of God. I then continue by looking at passages that also show that God is a "plurality in unity." After looking at these passages, I then move on to the few that show the "plurality in unity" is, in fact, a "tri-unity." This lesson will look at passages where the only conclusion is that God reveals Himself in the Bible as a "plurality in unity."

We will begin with the most important of verses to the Jewish person – the *Shema*.

Understanding the Hebrew word behind the English word is helpful.

God is always the word *Elohim*

LORD is always the word *Jehovah*

Lord is always the word *adon(ai)*

#### **Deuteronomy 6:4**

<i>Shema</i>	<i>Yisrael</i>	<i>Jehovah (Adonai)</i>	<i>Elohenu</i>	<i>Jehovah (Adonai)</i>	<i>echad.</i>
Here,	Israel,	the LORD	our God,	the LORD	is one.

1) Echad can be a compound unity

Genesis 1:5; 2:24; Ezra 2:64; Jeremiah 32:39

2) Another Hebrew word ("yachid") means "absolute unity."

Genesis 22:2

If God would have wanted to communicate an absolute one, the better word would have been *yachid*. Instead He chose the word *echad*.

We can conclude from this that Deuteronomy 6:4 does not speak against a plurality in unity but actually gives further weight to this belief. Again, it is helpful to remember that this verse alone would be weak evidence for a plurality in unity. However, in concert with the scores of other passages we can see a strong case made for the nature of God as a plurality in unity.

#### **Genesis 18 - 19**

In this passage we are confronted with something that is a common occurrence throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. The context in Genesis 18 and 19 leading up to Genesis 19:24 is helpful.

Genesis 18:1-22; 19:1,24

We are confronted with two Jehovahs in Genesis 19:24. How can we reconcile this passage with the clear biblical teaching there is only one God?

The only possible way is to understand that God is a plurality in unity. This would answer the problems posed by this passage. Any other answer leaves us short of reconciling this verse with the Biblical understanding that God is one.

The "plurality in unity" that we saw in Genesis 19:24 occurs many times in the *Tenach*.

As you share this truth with Jewish people, or others who have been taught there is no "plurality in unity" or "tri-unity" in the nature of God, remember that it will take much consideration and study of this, as well as the Holy Spirit's illuminating work, before people will see and embrace this. Although, you can see the issue clearly, they don't.

So: BE patient; GO slowly; AND repeat things to help the person understand.

### **Psalm 110:1**

As in Genesis 19:24 the problem is to reconcile this clear teaching of two Gods with the Biblical truth of only One God.

AND, we DO NOT believe in poly-theism (many gods)! We believe in mono-theism (one God).

The only way to reconcile this is to understand that God is a plurality-in-unity. This alone answers the dilemma.

### **Psalm 45:6-7**

These verses confront us with the same dilemma as Gen. 19:24 and Psalm 110:1.

We are confronted with the following from the Scriptures:

1. God is speaking to God.
2. God has anointed a man who is God.
3. Psalm 45:6-7 has two Gods in these verses.

How do we solve this dilemma when the Bible teaches there is only one God and we believe in mono-theism? God is a plurality-in-unity!

### **Isaiah 48:12-16**

The evidence for the Tri-unity of God is sparse in the *Tenach*, but it is NOT non-existent.

The book of Isaiah is the clearest of any in the Hebrew Scriptures that bring the three persons of the Godhead together in one passage. The best passage in Isaiah is 48:12-17.

When I share with a person using this section I will have them identify the speaker after each verse. We will see that it is consistently God that is speaking.

Isaiah 44:6

### **Isaiah 63:7-10**

In this section of Scripture we can also see the concept of the Triune God. The three persons of the Godhead are clearly brought forth.

Isaiah is the best book in the *Tenach* to identify the three (3) persons in the "plurality in unity" of God.

It is best, when sharing with a Jewish person, to lay the foundation that the Scripture (*Tenach*) reveals God as a "plurality in unity." From this foundation go to Isaiah 48:12-17. It is here that the "Tri-unity" of God can be shown.

The evidence of the nature of God in the Hebrew Scriptures is substantial when looked at as a whole. God is a plurality in unity - the plurality consisting of three persons.

Yet, it is the New Testament that puts "flesh on the bones." The New Testament helps to fill out and enable us to clearly see what the Hebrew Scriptures started developing.

We should not be intimidated when we share this vital truth. The evidence is present, even in the Hebrew Scriptures, about the nature of God. He is a Tri-unity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## **Jesus is God (Jehovah)!**

A corollary truth to the Tri-unity of God is the Scriptural teaching that the Messiah would be God.

The Tri-unity of God understanding is that in the unity of the Godhead, there are three divine persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are co-equal, co-eternal, and the same in substance and essence but distinct in subsistence.

The Scriptural teaching that the Messiah would be God is a necessary truth developing from the biblical revelation of the Triune nature of God.

## **Micah 5:2 (5:1 in the *Tenach*)**

## **Isaiah 9:6 (9:5 in the *Tenach*)**

## **Jeremiah 23:5-6**

## **Jeremiah 17:5, 7 (Psalm 2:12)**

## **Zechariah 12:8-10**

## **Evidences for Deity Appearing in Human Form**

It is important to emphasize that Bible believing Christians DON'T believe that man can become God.

This belief is blasphemous and certainly not biblical. But, the Bible DOES teach that God became man. The appearances in the Scripture of God appearing as a man are known as theophanies. Theophanies are always Christophanies as it was always the pre-incarnate Jesus who was the One who appeared.

Our earlier look in Lesson 2 at Genesis 18 and 19 is clearly a Christophany – a visible appearance of God in human form. There are additional scriptural passages that teach the same truth.

### **Genesis 16:7-14**

### **Genesis 32:24-30**

### **Judges 13:2-24**