

THE REVELATION
of the
TRINITY

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The Revelation of the Trinity

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The Shema

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is known to the faithful Jew as the Shema. "Shema" is Hebrew for "hear." Thus the Shema derives its title from the first word of the phrase, "Hear, O Israel. Reciting these verses twice daily (Sun up and Sun set, possibly because of verse 7- "... when you lie down and rise up."), the Jew's mind was constantly alerted to God's revelation of Himself. His day opened with the knowledge that there is but one God, and it closed with the same truth—that there is but one God. It could be said that the faithful Jew's daily thinking process started with the knowledge of the revelation of God and it ended with the knowledge of that same revelation—there is but one God.

This divine revelation from God about Himself set the standard, thus, the Jews of the Bible were to believe in only one God (monotheism). Not because He was their God, but because He is the only God (Isaiah 44:6, 8). There is no other but He (Mark 12:29-33). He is not a God for the Jews while there exists other gods for the Gentiles. The Jews understood clearly that God meant He is the only God. Thus, He is the God of all creation and kingdoms (II Kings 19:15; Is. 37:16). To think beyond the boundary of this revelation of God being one would be nothing short of blasphemy, deserving death.

It is important to recognize that the phrase "Hear O Israel" which introduces the Shema is used only four times in the Old Testament. All four occurrences are found only in the book of Deuteronomy. Within the context of the phrase there is each time either a direct or an indirect reminder that Israel is to worship and serve only the one true God.

Deuteronomy 5:1

In this verse Moses tells Israel to hear the statutes and the ordinances he is speaking. He then reminds them of the 10 commandments the first of which is "You shall have no other gods before me" (verse 7).

Deuteronomy 6:4

The beginning of the Shema reminds the Jew that the Lord is one.

Deuteronomy 9:1

In this chapter (Also see chapter 7:1-11) as Israel prepares to dispossess nations greater and mightier than themselves, God reminds them of their own unrighteousness (4 - 7) by recalling their worship of the golden calf (12-21). Here, as in chapter 7 Israel is reminded of their own vulnerability and the anger of God against them because of their sin (13-14, 19-20). Failure to drive out the nations would inevitably result in intermarriage, which would result in the hearts of the children of Israel being turned away from God to worship the false gods of the people of the land (7:3-4).

Deuteronomy 20:3

The context of this “Hear O Israel” is similar to that of chapter 9— the Lord going before them to drive out the ungodly. Only now, it is said that the priest is to acquire the attention of the people prior to heading into battle by calling, “Hear O Israel.” The mere mentioning of this phrase should have awakened the mind of every Jew to the fact that there is but one God, and that they were to love Him with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might. That His commands were to be in their heart, and that they were to teach them diligently to their children. That they were to talk of His Words when they sat in their houses and walked by the way. When they laid down and when they rose up. That His Words were to be as a sign on their hands and heads, written on the doorposts of their houses and gates. They needed only to examine the judgment of God on the people whose lives were about to be completely destroyed to see the consequences of failing to keep His Word!

Mark 12:29

The phrase “Hear O Israel” is used one time in the New Testament. In Mark 12:29 Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 in response to a questioning scribe. The scribe’s response (v. 32) reveals the Jewish understanding of the verse—

“And the scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher, you have truly stated that He is One; and there is no one else besides Him...”

Verse 34 confirms the accuracy of the scribe’s understanding.

One God

The fact that God is one is not limited to the Shema or the verses affiliated with it. On the contrary, the Bible is replete with clear statements regarding the oneness of the nature of God.

Deuteronomy 6:4

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!”

II Kings 19:15

“And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, ‘O LORD, the God of Israel, who art enthroned {above} the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth.’”

Nehemiah 9:6

“Thou alone art the LORD. Thou hast made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them and the heavenly host bows down before Thee.”

Psalms 86:10

“For Thou art great and doest wondrous deeds; Thou alone art God.”

Isaiah 37:16

“O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who art enthroned {above} the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth.”

Isaiah 43:10

“ ‘You are My witnesses,’ declares the LORD, And My servant whom I have chosen, in order that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am He. Before me there was no God formed, and there will be none after me.”

Isaiah 43:11

“I, even I, am the LORD; and there is no savior besides me.”

Isaiah 44:6

“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me.’”

Isaiah 44:8

“Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides me, or is there any {other} Rock? I know of none.”

Isaiah 45:5

“I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no God. I will give you, though you have not known me...”

Isaiah 45:6

“That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other...”

Isaiah 45:18

“For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, {But} formed it to be inhabited), "I am the LORD, and there is none else.”

Isaiah 45:21-22

“Declare and set forth {your case;} indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except me. "Turn to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”

Mark 12:29-30

“Jesus answered, ‘The foremost is, `Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”

1 Corinthians 8:4

“Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.”

Ephesians 4:6

“...one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

1 Timothy 2:5

“For there is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus...”

One God, Three Persons

As clearly as the Bible declares the fact that there is but one God it also declares that there are three persons in the Godhead. Scripture, on one hand presents the fact that there is only one God and on the other refers to three distinct persons as God.

The following table demonstrates how the Bible refers to all the members of the Trinity as God, and at the same time references verses which inform us of the fact that there is but one God. Thus, it is evident that the message of Scripture is that God is one in essence and three in persons.

One God		
Deuteronomy 6:4; 2 Kings 19:15; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 86:10; Isaiah 37:16; 43:10-11; 44:6, 8; 45:5-6, 18, 21-22; 46:5, 9; Mark 12:29-30; 1 Corinthians 8:4; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:5		
Three Persons		
Father called God	Son called God	Spirit called God
John 6:27, 44-46. In these verses Jesus affirms the Father as God.	Hebrews 1:6-8; Matthew 4:10. The Father calls the Son God, and the angels worship the Son.	Acts 5:3-5. Peter made no distinction between the Spirit and God, but acknowledged Him as God.

God is one in essence (being, nature, substance). The Bible never refers to the nature of God pluralistically. For it to do so would be a direct contradiction of Deuteronomy 6:4 and all other verses, of which there are many, that declare that there is but one God.

Each person of the Trinity is coequal. This is to say that each person of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is fully God, but distinct from each other in person. The Bible demonstrates the equality of each when referring to each as God. Likewise, the Bible demonstrates their distinction in various places (Matthew 3:16-17; Hebrews 9:14).

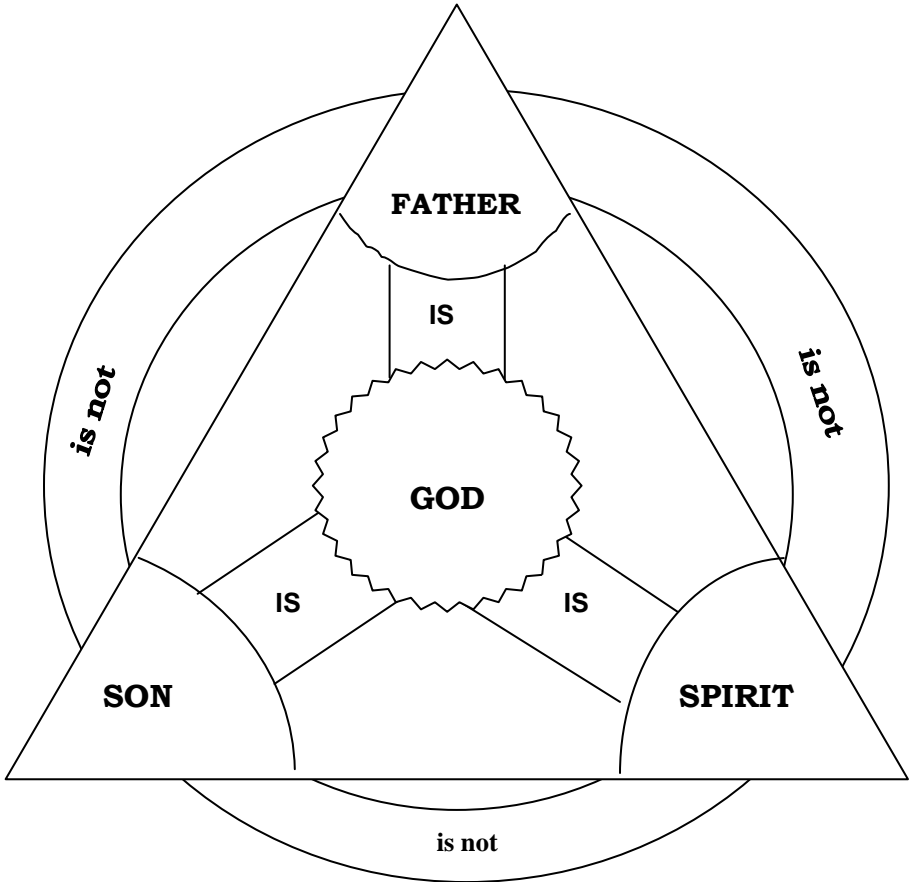
Therefore, we may conclude that it is Biblical to believe and say that *God is one in being and three in persons*. The word *Trinity* when correctly understood is a summarization of this very truth.

Opponents of the Trinity mistakenly refer to the Council of Nicea (325 A. D.) as being the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity. Unfortunately they fail to realize that the Nicene Creed (result of the Council) did not create or establish the doctrine of the Trinity. It only upheld and affirmed what the Scripture clearly taught concerning the nature and being of God. Theologian, Walter Martin stated this clearly when regarding the Nicene Creed he wrote,

“Thus the church recognized what the apostles and prophets had always taught — that the Messiah shares the nature of God, as does the Holy Spirit — ‘neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.’”¹

The revelation of God from Scripture is that there is but one God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. However, the three persons of the Godhead are completely distinct from each other. The diagram on the following page attempts to illustrate this fact in conjunction with the other Biblical truth that there is but one God.

ANCIENT DIAGRAM of the TRINITY²



This diagram depicts the following two parameters for thinking of the nature and persons of God with respect to the Trinity.

1. Do not divide the substance (GOD is one in being). God's being is also sometimes referred to as His essence, His nature, as well as His substance. To divide God's nature results in polytheism (More than one God).
2. Do not confound the persons (The persons of the Trinity are distinct from each other). To confound the individual persons of the Godhead is to deny the individuality of each of the distinct persons.

One God, Three Persons—The Biblical Parameter for Thinking of God

Everyone who drives is familiar with speed limit signs. These signs indicate the legal speed within which a person is allowed to operate his or her automobile.

On the freeway there are two types of speed limit signs- “maximum” and “minimum.” These signs indicate the legal **range** of speed for driving on the freeway. Under this condition an automobile can be driven as fast as the maximum speed limit and as slow as the minimum speed limit, and remain within the parameters of the law. Driving outside of this range, on either end, constitutes a violation of the law. So the maximum and minimum speed limits on the freeway establish a range in which a driver can legally operate his or her vehicle. As long as the driver remains within this range he does not have to fear violating the law, or receiving a ticket for the violation.

In a way, this speed limit range helps us to have a little insight into how we are to think when it comes to the nature of God. It can be said that the Trinity is the Bible’s way of setting the limits or parameter by which we are to think about God. If we go beyond this limit in our thinking of God, then we have violated God’s truth to us about Himself. Violating God’s truth results in error (Matthew 22:29). The results of which can be devastating, especially when it comes to the doctrine of God Himself (Psalm 50:21-23).

The Bible reveals the Father to us as God, Jesus to us as God, and the Holy Spirit to us as God, yet it also tells us that there is only one God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all three distinctly separate persons, and at the same time they are each fully God. They do not make up God when all three are together (they are co-equal, and co-eternal), nor do they take away from God when they are all three separate. This is the Biblical limit for thinking about God. He is one in being and three in persons.

You might be thinking, “I don’t fully understand this.” You are not alone, although we cannot totally understand it, or even totally explain it, that does not make it untrue nor does it make God unknowable. Remember the speed limit signs we spoke of earlier? Does a person have to fully understand why a road has a certain speed limit before he believes and obeys the law? No. Can you imagine for a moment a person

telling a policeman that he does not deserve a ticket for doing 100 mph in a 45 mph speed zone, just because he doesn't understand why the speed has been set at that limit?

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." In these verses God is explaining to us that His ways and thoughts are beyond what we are able to understand. The phrase, "God is incomprehensible" is used to explain this aspect of God. This means that it is impossible for us to totally understand God.

However, that God is incomprehensible does not mean that we cannot know God and understand what He has revealed to us about Himself in the pages of the Bible. Jeremiah 9:24 teaches us that we can have some understanding of the things God has revealed about Himself but because God is infinite, we will never be able to fully comprehend Him.

When we think about God as He has described Himself in the Bible then our minds are operating safely. They are thinking within Scriptural parameters. If we believe things about God that are outside the limits of the description of Himself He provides in the Bible, then we will end up violating His Word. Because the Bible is God's Word we can believe the description of God which it gives to us.

Additional Examples of the Trinity in Scripture

The Creation

The Scripture reveals all three members of the Godhead at work in the creation account. At the same time Scripture says that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 20:11).

The Spirit — Genesis 1:2

The Son — Colossians 1:13-16

The Father — Hebrews 1:2

The Making of Man

Genesis 1:26

“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.’”

The Baptism of Jesus

At Christ’s baptism all three members of the Godhead are distinctly presented before the onlookers (Matthew 3:16-17).

The Resurrection of Jesus

All three members of the Godhead were involved in raising Christ from the dead.

Romans 1:1-4

Father — Acts 3:26

Jesus — John 2:19-21

Spirit — Romans 8:11

The Redemption of Man

The writer of the book of Hebrews shows the distinct members of the Godhead active in the redemption of God’s elect through the sacrifice of Christ. At the same time the Bible declares that salvation is of the Lord (Ps. 37:39-40; Jonah 2:9).

Hebrews 9:13-14

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

The Incarnation—God Became Flesh

The Bible also has another profound way of explaining the things God wants us to know about Himself. The Bible tells us the story of Jesus and according to John 1:18 Jesus is the explanation of God,

“No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

In Christ God became a man. The second person of the Trinity, we know as Jesus, also called the Word in John 1:1 became flesh.

John 1:1

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 1:14

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Matthew 1:23

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name 'Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'"

The fact that God became a man does not in any way constitute a change or in this case a division in the nature of God. Briefly consider this truth in Scripture.

God Is Spirit

John 4:24

“God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Although God is described in Scripture as being a Spirit, Scripture also describes God in human terms. The description of God in human terms is known as “anthropomorphism.” Attributing human emotion to God is another form of anthropomorphic language known as “anthropopathism.” See Exodus 24:10; John 10:29; Genesis 6:6; Exodus 20:5; Psalm 77:9.

Through anthropomorphic language we learn that God, although not a man (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29) is not merely an impersonal force or power but is indeed a personal being.

Furthermore, Scripture declares that God does not change. That God does not change is called God's immutability.

Numbers 23:19

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

1 Samuel 15:29

"And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind."

Psalms 90:1-2

"Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God."

Malachi 3:6

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed."

James 1:17

"Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow."

Therefore, since Scripture teaches us that God never changes, the fact that the New Testament teaches that God became a man does not permit us to conclude that the divine nature changed. Instead we conclude as the Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus is both God and man. This is referred to as the "hypostatic union" of Christ. Jesus is both deity and humanity. Thus, the incarnation of Christ does not contradict the fact that God does not change. In the one person of Christ there exists two distinct natures--deity and humanity. Colossians 2:9 speaks of the fullness of His deity in bodily form. Philippians 2:5-8 reveals His humanity.

When we described the Trinity we said that we are not to divide the nature of God or confound the persons of the Godhead. In describing Jesus we are not to confound the natures or divide the person. Jesus is one person with a distinctly divine nature as well as a distinctly human nature. Once again we may not be able to completely understand this truth but it is in fact the parameter within which we must maintain our thoughts concerning the identity of Jesus if we are to remain biblical.

Many New Testament verses depict Christ's humanity (Jn. 1:14; Mt. 23-His birth). As a man Jesus ate, drank, suffered, and died (Mt. 26:20-23, 38; Mt. 27:50). He was truly a man. To deny this is heresy and equivalent to being antichrist (1 Jn. 4:2-3; 2Jn. 7).

Likewise, many New Testament verses depict Christ's deity (Jn. 1:1 with 1:14). He is God with us (Mt. 1:23). The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Col. 2:9). The fact that in the New Testament Jesus received worship is a clear indication that He is God. In the wilderness temptation Jesus told Satan that, "...it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Mt. 4:10). When Jesus accepted worship, He was testifying to His own deity.

Matthew 8:2-3

"And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." (KJV)

Matthew 9:18-19

"While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples." (KJV)

Matthew 14:33

"Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God." (KJV)

Matthew 15:25

"Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me." (KJV)

Matthew 28:9-10

“And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.” (KJV)

Matthew 28:17

“And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.” (KJV)

The Father also testifies to the deity of Jesus when He says in Hebrews 1:6, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.”

Apostles Reject Worship

While the apostles worshipped Christ as God, they reject worship toward themselves (Jn. 20:28; Acts 10:25).

Following the healing of a crippled man, the people of Lystra began to refer to Paul and Barnabas as gods. At one point people of Lystra were going to make a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. But when the apostles received word of this they tore their clothes, and immediately began to instruct the crowd that they were but men. And even saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them (Acts 14:8-18).

A Fellow servant of John’s Rejects Worship

John, twice records the rejection of worship by a fellow servant. Not only did this servant not receive worship, but he exhorted John to worship God (Revelation 19:9-10; 22:8-9).

Herod Accepts Worship

Herod dressed in his royal robes addressed the people. They responded saying that his voice was the voice of a god and not of a man. And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory. The Bible goes on to say that he was eaten by worms (Acts 12:20-23). To receive worship is an acknowledgment of deity.

Because Jesus was God in the flesh, He accepted worship without rebuking those who worshiped Him. Neither were those who worshiped Him penalized or disciplined by the Father. Even the wise men from the

East worshiped Jesus while He was yet a young boy, and after having done so they were protected by God the Father (Matthew 2:11-12).

God does not approve of free for all thinking when it comes to the nature of His being. In Scripture He has clearly set the parameters within which we are to maintain our thoughts of Him. Failure to do so incurs His wrath as He Himself says,

Psalms 50:21-22

²¹ “These things you have done, and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes. ²² “Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.”

When we confine our thoughts of God to the parameters of the divine revelation of the Bible we will know true freedom. In John 8:31-32 Jesus said,

“If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

¹ Dr. Walter Martin, *Essential Christianity*, © 1962, 1975, 1980 by Walter R. Martin.

² Books illustrating similar diagram:

Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 201.

H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 45.