

When “One” Really Means “More than One”

One of the most desperate arguments produced by Trinitarians seeks support from the cardinal tenet of Jewish and biblical monotheism. Deuteronomy 6:4 declares with magnificent simplicity that the Lord God is one. This rock-certain testimony to the undivided oneness of God has not deterred some Trinitarians from a daring attempt to turn one into three.

The world of Old Testament scholarship as well as lexicography of the Hebrew language lend no support whatever to the notion that the Hebrew word *echad* (one) really implies a composite oneness. *Echad* occurs well over 500 times in the Hebrew Bible. Its meaning is one, and not two or more (see Ecc. 4:9-11). *Echad* is the numeral “one.” It sometimes comes into English appropriately as “a single one.”

On what basis then can anyone propose that *echad* denotes a compound unity, allowing the One Lord to be a Godhead of three Persons? Trinitarians, even today,¹ are inviting us to believe that “one” contains within itself the idea of plurality. Here is the “proof”: Adam and Eve, as two persons, became one flesh (Gen. 2:24). “One bunch of grapes” points to a plurality of grapes.

This is an argument which can catch the unwary off-guard. We may imagine that “one” must mean “more than one” because “one flesh,” in this context Adam and Eve, obviously denotes more than one person. But the simple fact is that the idea of plurality is derived strictly from the joining of Adam and Eve and the many grapes in the bunch, and not at all from the word “one.” Adam and Eve formed “one flesh” and not two “fleshes.” There was one bunch and not two bunches. *Echad* in itself gives not a hint of plurality. A numerical adjective, “one,” may modify a collective noun. But this does not alter the invariably singular meaning of “one.”

No lexicon ever defined *echad* as “compound one.” (Could “two,” then, really mean “three or more”?) How well would the idea of compound unity suit the fact that “Abraham was one [*echad*]” (Ezek. 33:24, “only one man,” NIV)? Was he compounded of a number of body parts?

¹ See for example, Robert Morey, *The Trinity, Evidence and Issues*, World Publishing, 1996, 88, 89.

When “one” is applied to the One Lord God of Israel, there is no reason to believe that He is more than one Person. He is the One Lord, alone and without division. The argument that *Elohim*, “God,” has a plural ending is also a non-starter, since a singular individual, the Messiah or a single pagan god, can also be called *Elohim* (1 Sam. 5:7; Ps. 45:6).

Thankfully, candid Trinitarians recognize the weakness of the argument from the plural ending on *Elohim*. Gregory Boyd in *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* confesses that it is, “as most Hebrew scholars recognize, a very weak argument on which to base the doctrine of the Trinity.” *Elohim* “is applied to the one angelic being who wrestled with Jacob (Gen. 32:30) and to the one golden calf the Israelites worshiped (Exod. 32:1, 4, 8).” He goes on to say: “Even weaker is the argument that the Hebrew word for ‘one’ (*echad*) used in the Shema . . . refers to a unified one, not an absolute one.” Gen. 2:24 (“one flesh”) “really proves nothing The context must determine whether a numerical or unified singularity is intended.”²

Since Jesus affirmed the creed of Israel (Mark 12:28ff), it is clear that the Christian creed stemming from Jesus’ own confession presents a unitary, not a Trinitarian, monotheism. Christian unity will take a giant step forward when we see that Jesus is the one Lord *Messiah* (Luke 2:11; 1 Cor. 8:6), foreseen as the second Lord of Psalm 110:1, and not the One Lord *God*. The Jewish roots of Jesus are nowhere so dramatically in view as in his recitation of the non-Trinitarian creed of Israel.

It is our wisdom to adopt the Jewish mind of Jesus in our definition of God. We then avoid the danger of creating God after the image of our Gentile hearts.

² Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992, 47, 48.