

Deuteronomy 6:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

Analysis

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

This is the Shema (שְׁמָה, 'Hear'), the most important confession of faith in Judaism. The Hebrew declares Yahweh eloheinu Yahweh echad (יְהָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהָה אֶחָד), which can be translated several ways: 'The LORD our God, the LORD is one,' or 'The LORD our God is one LORD,' or 'The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.' All emphasize the absolute uniqueness and unity of Yahweh.

The word echad (אחד, 'one') denotes unified oneness, the same word used in Genesis 2:24 ('one flesh'). This foundational statement of monotheism distinguished Israel from all surrounding nations with their polytheistic pantheons. Yahweh is not merely the chief god among many, nor is He divided into different aspects or localized manifestations. He is uniquely one—singular in being, undivided in essence, exclusive in worship.

Theologically, the Shema establishes:

1. monotheism as the foundation of biblical faith
2. exclusive loyalty to Yahweh alone
3. the unity and simplicity of God's nature
4. the basis for the command to love God wholeheartedly (v. 5).

Jesus identified this as the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29-30), and it remains the foundation of Christian orthodoxy, refined by Trinitarian theology which maintains divine unity while acknowledging three persons.

Historical Context

The Shema and its surrounding exhortations were delivered as Israel prepared to enter a land filled with competing religious systems. Canaanite religion was polytheistic, with gods like Baal, Asherah, El, and Mot controlling different aspects of life—fertility, weather, death, etc. The temptation would be to hedge theological bets by worshiping Yahweh for some things while turning to Canaanite deities for others.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples generally practiced henotheism (devotion to one god while acknowledging others' existence) rather than monotheism. Egypt worshiped hundreds of deities, Mesopotamia had complex pantheons, and Canaan's religion was syncretistic. Israel's radical monotheism was unique in the ancient world, claiming that Yahweh alone is God and all other so-called gods are false.

The command to teach children (vv. 6-9) established intergenerational faith transmission as central to Israel's identity. Unlike surrounding nations whose priests controlled religious knowledge, Israel democratized spiritual responsibility—every household became a center for teaching Torah. This domestic religious education would preserve monotheism and covenant identity through subsequent generations.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the Shema's emphasis on God's oneness challenge modern pluralism and religious syncretism?

2. What does it mean practically to love God with 'all your heart, soul, and strength' in daily life?
3. How should Christians balance grace (God's prior love) and responsibility (commanded love) in their relationship with God?

Interlinear Text

עַד יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ שָׁמָע

Hear O Israel LORD our God LORD is one

H8085 H3478 H3068 H430 H3068 H259

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 44:6 (References God): Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

1 Timothy 2:5 (References God): For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

John 17:3 (References God): And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

John 10:30 (Parallel theme): I and my Father are one.

Isaiah 42:8 (References Lord): I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

Isaiah 44:8 (References God): Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

Deuteronomy 5:6 (References God): I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

1 Chronicles 29:10 (References God): Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.

1 Kings 18:21 (References God): And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

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