

The Divine Unity and the Deity of Messiah

By Noam Hendren, ThM
Chairman, National Evangelism Committee, Israel
Senior Lecturer, Israel College of the Bible, Netanya

Israel's Historical-Religious Context

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

The unity of God is axiomatic to the faith of the Jewish people. Not only is the “Shema” the essential statement of faith in Judaism, it is the personal declaration of faith for every Jew. Throughout the centuries, Jews have lived and have been willing to die for “kiddush haShem,” the ‘sanctification of the Name’ as expressed in this simple, yet deeply profound, creed.

With the expansion of the major monotheistic religions, which today dominate more than half of the world’s population, the faith in one God may appear to be a universal “given,” a commonplace which has always been obvious to thinking people everywhere. Yet clearly that is not the case. The revelation of this truth—or, from a biblical perspective, its restoration—came in the context of worldwide idolatry, at a time when the most advanced civilizations of the ancient world were hopelessly polytheistic.

Israel’s roots and the context of her early existence—from the beginning and until well after the coming of Yeshua the Messiah—are in pagan polytheism. From the time of the Patriarchs and until the return from Babylonian captivity, Israel’s key challenge—and most consistent failure—was in the struggle against idolatrous worship. Over five hundred years after the call of Abram, Joshua still needed to lay the challenge before the nation:

“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (*Joshua 24:15*).

Little wonder that the Biblical revelation is so emphatically monotheistic, not only in underlying theology but also in the nuances of expression. The Biblical prophets, from Moses on, were fighting an uphill battle to wean Israel from her pagan roots and to immunize her from the contagion of polytheism which surrounded her on every side; and with which she shared the Land of Canaan. Every phrase spoken and written would be weighed to exalt the one true God and to exclude utterly the ‘gods of the nations’ from the faith and worship of Israel.

This, Israel’s cultural and religious context, must inform our interpretation of the Biblical evidence concerning the nature of God and the person of Messiah if we are to understand that revelation aright.

The Unity of the Godhead

The expression of the divine unity in the Shema includes at least two senses: singularity and uniqueness. The Lord God of Israel is one God, not many. Israel has no pantheon;

neither is the divine name (YHWH) a collective term designating abstract divinity which comes to expression in a multitude of individual deities.¹ The golden calf incident flies in the face of this truth not only by representing the infinite God by a created object, but also by associating the Lord with the plethora of pagan gods worshipped in Egypt and Canaan.

“[Aaron] took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt’. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, ‘Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD [YHWH]’” (Exod. 32:4-5; cf. I Kgs. 12:28).

The fact of God’s singularity, however, does not deny the existence of other spirit beings. In the wilderness Israel “sacrificed to demons, which are not God —gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear”² (Deut. 32:17). But the Shema declares that the Lord is unique as the infinite and self-existent One.³ Moses also declares: “the LORD is God; besides him there is no other” (Deut. 4:35). And Isaiah reaffirms: “Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me” (Isa. 45:21). The God of Israel is the only One worthy of the name.

Significantly, the Rambam (Maimonides), in his Thirteen Principles, speaks of God not as “*echad*” (“one”) in the words of the Shema, but as “*yachid*”: “[God] is one (or “unique”, Heb. *yachid*), and there is no oneness (*yechidut*) like unto His⁴.” Why should the Rambam abandon the language of the universally accepted credo of Israel in his declaration of Israel’s essential faith? The answer lies in the Rambam’s Aristotelian conception of God as an absolute philosophical unity⁵ (as in Islam); one which contrasts starkly with the Biblical description of God as a compound personal unity.

For the Rambam, the term “*echad*” allowed for elements of personal complexity within the Godhead which he had excluded *a priori* for philosophical reasons. As used in the Tanach, “*echad*” is the word of choice to express the unification of two or more elements to form one entity. Whether it is “the evening and the morning” combining to form “one day” (Gen. 1:5), male and female becoming “one flesh” (2:24), or Ezekiel’s two sticks becoming “one stick” in his hand (37:17), a compound unity is the result.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the above examples, because the God of Israel is infinite spirit, His unity is not the linking of pieces into an artificial “jigsaw puzzle” oneness, nor is it the combination of elements to form a new compound. His one eternal divine

¹ Cf. use of “God” in ancient Greek writers; as well as Hinduism and its gods.

² Cf. I Cor. 8:4-6 with 10:19-20.

³ The name “YHWH” being most likely the 3rd person singular, Hif’il imperfect from the root HYH/HWH, meaning “the eternal cause of being” and therefore “the self-existent One.”

⁴ Maimonides composed the Thirteen Principles in Arabic, but they were translated into Hebrew in consultation with him and appear in the traditional Ashkenazi prayerbook at the end of the daily Shacharit service.

⁵ For Rambam’s discussion of the nature of God and His “simplicity,” in interaction with Aristotelian philosophical principles, see his **Guide of the Perplexed** (passim).

“substance” is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-10), and thus the distinctions within the Godhead are not material, but rather personal—as we shall see. Truly God’s unity is unique.

Thus, by describing the Lord as “*echad*”, the Shema does not exclude complexity within the essential divine unity. As the Rambam understood, the term falls far short of asserting an absolute philosophical unity.

Divine Dialogues: Personal Plurality in the One God

Despite the dangers of miscommunication to a people besieged by idolatry, the Tanach repeatedly alludes to—or emphatically asserts—a personal plurality in the Godhead.

The first hints of plurality are found in the terms used to designate God, “*Elohim*” and “*Adonai*,” both of which are plural forms of existing singular nouns.⁶ Had the Biblical authors intended to assert the absolute (rather than compound) unity of the Godhead, they had readily available singular terms (*Eloah*, *Adoni*, as well as *El*) which would have avoided any confusion on this crucial point.⁷ And while it is usual for *Elohim*, for example, to appear with singular verbs and adjectives (Gen. 1:1; Exod. 34:6); on a number of occasions a plural is used: “God caused (*hit ‘u*) me to wander” (Gen. 20:13); “He is a holy God (*elohim kedoshim*)” (Josh. 24:19); “Remember your Creator” (lit., “Creators,” Eccl. 12:1); “Let Israel rejoice his Maker” (lit., “Makers,” Psa. 149:2).

Such occurrences can be dismissed as mere grammatical agreement, but given Israel’s cultural and religious setting and the dangerous implications of the plural forms in that context, it is hard to explain a sudden attack of grammatical precision on the part of monotheism’s guardian angels. However one chooses to relate to the preceding anomalies, they leave the door ajar for an understanding of plurality within the Godhead.

God Himself pushes the door wide open in the Genesis One account of mankind’s creation:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Verse 26 describes the interpersonal communication which took place within the Godhead on the occasion of man’s creation, the climax of the entire account. This divine consultation is revealed in order that the readers might understand God’s purposes in the creation, centered on mankind made in God’s image. Man has been created as a personal-social being, even as his Creator is personal and social. But while God would later declare “it is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18), God Himself lacked nothing,

⁶ In contrast to the term *shamayim* [“heavens”] which does not appear in a singular form in Scripture. The final syllable of “*Adonai*” is always pointed with the *kamatz* when referring to the God of Israel. The plural here may be related to the plural of ownership, which is common in Biblical Hebrew with the nouns “*adon*” and “*ba ‘al*” (Cf. Gen. 24:9; 39:2 and Exod. 21:29; Isa. 1:3 for examples of each).

⁷ *Eloah* appears approximately 50 times in Scripture with reference to God (usually in poetic sections, esp. Job; cf. Habb. 3:3); whereas *Elohim* is used over 1500 times.

being eternally satisfied with personal relationship and communication within the Godhead itself (cf. John 17:27, “for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”).

Certain Rabbinic interpreters have posited that God’s interaction in this passage was with the angels, with whom He consulted prior to man’s creation. This proposal is in sharp contrast to the declaration of Isaiah that God consults with no other being in planning and carrying out His purposes (Isa. 40:13-14). It is further contradicted by verse 27, which reasserts the essential unity of God, making it clear that He alone created man and that man was created in His image, not in that of God plus the angels⁸. It is significant that, in Breshit Rabba, the sages portray Moses as challenging God’s wisdom in allowing this passage to be written as it was: “Why do you give an excuse to the *Minim* [Jewish followers of Yeshua]?”⁹ Apparently the implications of the passage were clear enough to them!

Similar consultations are recorded on the occasion of two other especially significant divine interventions in early biblical history: following the fall of man (Gen. 3:22-23), and in response to the building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7). In the first, man, having eaten from the tree of knowledge, is described as having become “like one of us, knowing good and evil”—a clear parallel to the serpent’s promise that they would become “like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). As before, the deliberation is followed by God Himself acting (singular verb): here, driving Adam and Eve out of the garden (cf. 1:26-27 and 11:6-8). In each case the plural pronoun (“Us”, “Our”) is identified with God alone, and all others are thereby excluded.

Divine Teamwork: Personal Plurality II

Not only is there interpersonal communication within the Godhead, the Scriptures also refer to two or more distinct personalities as “God” or “LORD” (YHWH) in the same context (for example, Gen. 19:24; Psalm 45:7-8; Isa. 48:12-16; 63:7-14; Zech. 2:12-13). In these passages, the distinct persons of the Godhead are seen fulfilling different roles in the execution of the divine program.

In Zechariah Two, an angel of God is sent to bring a message from the Lord to Zechariah:

“Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I,” says the LORD, “will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.”... For thus says the LORD of hosts: “He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me.”¹⁰

The Lord declares Himself to be the protective wall and glorious presence in the midst of the future restored Jerusalem. He continues making first person pronouncements, calling on Israel to leave the lands of her dispersion, “whither I have scattered you,” declares the

⁸ It is, perhaps, significant that mankind’s common ground with the Son of God, in contrast to the angels, is asserted in Hebrews 2:9, 14-16.

⁹ Breshit Rabba, Parasha Chet, section 8.

¹⁰ Zech. 2:4-5, 8-9; in Heb. vv. 8-9, 12-13

LORD” (v. 6, Heb. v. 10). Then, surprisingly, “the LORD of hosts” says, “He sent Me after glory,” to bring certain judgment to the nations which had plundered Israel, by shaking “My hand against them.” The “Me” of verse 8 (Heb. v. 12) is the speaker, “the LORD of hosts,” who by a mere wave of His hand brings destruction on His enemies (Compare “the waving of the hand of the LORD” in Isa. 19:16). Who then could be the ‘sender’ of the LORD of hosts? The divine Speaker continues, explaining that when the plundering nations become “spoil for their servants”, “you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me.”

“The LORD of hosts” sends “the LORD of hosts” to execute judgment on Israel’s enemies and thereby glorify Himself. A clear personal distinction is revealed to exist within the Godhead, each equally “the LORD of hosts”, and yet One sending the Other to carry out the divine work. Because Israel is “the apple of His eye,”¹¹ the Lord will entrust this job to no one but the Lord Himself.

When we turn to Isaiah 48:12-16 we find a similar situation, but with an added player. Once again we must carefully note that throughout the passage the Lord God of Israel is identified as the speaker. The Speaker is the one who “called” Israel and is “the First” and “the Last” (v. 12; cf. 44:6). He is the creator and sovereign Lord of the heavens and the earth (v. 13). As He summoned all creation to attention (v. 13b), so He now calls Israel to attend to His comforting promise: To punish Babylon, Israel’s oppressor, through his chosen instrument (Cyrus, Isa. 44:28; 45:1) and thereby bring about Israel’s restoration (Vv. 14-15; cf. v. 20; 45:13; 46:11).

In verse 16, the divine Speaker again calls for Israel’s focused attention in order to assure her that His revelation of this promise has been publicly and confidently made, because He Himself has been involved from the beginning to insure its fulfillment. Without the slightest indication of a change in the speaker, He concludes: “And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me.”¹² As in Zechariah 2, the divine Revelator is also the divine Executor of God’s saving works, even when a human instrument such as Cyrus is also used. He is the agent and representative of the entire Godhead by whom He is sent; and yet, though clearly distinct, He declares Himself to be God, the creator of the cosmos who also called Israel into existence.¹³

¹¹ Interestingly, the phrase “His eye” in verse 8 (12) is an example of the “scribal emendations,” wherein the ancient copyists changed the biblical text intentionally because they found its sense offensive. (Job 2:9, “Bless God and die!” instead of “Curse God and die!” is another well-known example). The original text of Zechariah read “My eye,” again confirming that the speaker throughout the text—and the One sent—is the Lord God Himself.

¹² Or, “has sent Me and His Spirit.” The grammar of the passage allows for “His Spirit” to be either part of the subject or another object of “sent.” For the interpretation of this passage and its significance in this section of Isaiah, see Allan A. Macrae, “The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah—Part II”, **Bibliotheca Sacra**, Vol. 121, No. 483, p. 225-226 (July 1964).

¹³ Cf. also Isaiah 63:7-14, where “the LORD,” the “Angel of His presence,” and “His Holy Spirit” (vv. 10-11; also called the “Spirit of the Lord”, v. 14) are mentioned as jointly involved in the redemption of Israel. Compare also Exod. 23:20-21 and 33:14-23.

Theophanies in the Tanach: the Angel of the Lord

The revelation of personal distinctions in the one true God comes to remarkable expression in the repeated physical appearances of God in order to reveal Himself and His will to His chosen instruments. In these appearances, God takes on true physical form, often human form, as a distinct localization of the omnipresent, invisible God in heaven whom He reveals. These physical manifestations of the Deity caused considerable consternation to later Rabbinic interpreters, who sometimes adjusted the text¹⁴ or paraphrased its translation¹⁵ in order to mitigate—what was to their thinking—a theological inconsistency.

In the Patriarchal period, God is often described as “appearing” in clearly physical form.¹⁶ One could argue that such manifestations were merely visions representing themselves to the mind of the individual (cf. Gen. 15:17; 28:12-15), but in certain cases the true physical embodiment of God on earth is undeniable.¹⁷ Genesis 18 is perhaps the classic example.

This passage opens with the simple statement that “the LORD appeared to him [Abraham] at the Oaks of Mamre” (v. 1). What Abraham actually sees is three “men,” two of whom the text later calls “angels” (cf. v. 22 and 19:1). All three are shown Abraham’s best hospitality, including washing their feet (v. 4); and he waits on them hand and foot while they eat (v. 8). There can be no question that all three are real physical manifestations and not mere visions.

The third individual is the focus of Abraham’s attention, and Abraham addresses Him personally as “*Adonai*,” calling Him “the judge of the whole earth” (vv. 3, 25, 27, 30-32). When this person speaks, it is as the “LORD” (YHWH, vv. 13, 17, 20, 26, 33), Who has chosen Abraham to fulfill a crucial role in His plan for world redemption (vv. 17-19). He also reconfirms the promise that Sarah would bear a son, Isaac, just as “God” [*Elohim*] had promised when He “appeared” to Abraham in the previous chapter (vv. 10, 14; cf. 17:15-19). Having agreed to preserve Sodom if ten righteous men can be found in her, the LORD “walks” away (18:33)—apparently following the path of the two angels (cf. vv. 20-22).¹⁸

¹⁴ E.g. Gen. 18:22, another “scribal emendation,” the original text saying, “And the Lord remained standing before Abraham.” Since “stand before” was the typical expression for the posture of a servant, it was considered inappropriate for God.

¹⁵ E.g. Fragmentary Targum for Gen. 18:1 has the “*Memra* [“Word” in Aramaic] of the LORD” replacing the LORD Himself as the one appearing to Abraham (cf. John 1:1, 14). Similarly, the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum translates, “And the Glory [*Yekara*] of the LORD appeared to him...” (cf. Onkelos Targum on 18:33).

¹⁶ Genesis 12:7; 15:17; 16:7, 11, 13; 17:1; 18:1-33; 22:11, 12; 26:2, 24; 32:24-32; Exodus 3:2-4, 6, 16; 24:9-11.

¹⁷ Compare also the “Man” who wrestled with Jacob and whom Jacob recognized as God Himself (Gen. 32:25-31).

¹⁸ It is conceivable that all three “men” together constituted the physical manifestation of the Godhead. The LORD had said that He would go down to evaluate Sodom’s sin, and the two angels departed for there immediately (18:21-22). The two angels claim that the LORD had sent them to destroy the city (19:13), and yet it is “the LORD” Himself who rains down fire and brimstone (19:24). As the angels are leading Lot

After the two angels reconnoitered the situation in Sodom, and removed Lot and his family, “the LORD rained down on Sodom fire and brimstone from the LORD, from heaven” (19:24). God, who has temporarily assumed human form, is distinct from God in heaven and exercises the prerogative of God (judgment) in His name.

In a number of passages, beginning with the revelation to Hagar in Genesis 16, the visible manifestation of God is referred to as “the Angel of the LORD”--the term “angel” (*mal’akh*) meaning literally, “messenger” or “emissary.”¹⁹ As used throughout the Torah and the Former Prophets (the historical books), the context of each passage makes it clear that God Himself is the one intended, though in a physical form. The phrase “the Angel of the LORD” thus becomes a technical term for such a divine manifestation.²⁰

God’s self-revelation to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-15) demonstrates the identity of the ‘Angel of the LORD’ with the ‘LORD’ Himself; manifested, in this case, in a non-human form. The divine appearance at Horeb is introduced in verse 2 with the phrase, “Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a burning flame from within the bush.” Already in verse 4 we are told that “the LORD” saw that Moses had turned to see the phenomenon and as a result “God [*Elohim*] called to him from the midst of the bush.”

That the divine Person was literally present is evident from the command which arrested the approaching Moses, “Remove your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (v. 5).²¹ To leave no doubt as to who was present, God immediately identified Himself as “the God of Abraham...Isaac...and Jacob,” and Moses appropriately covered his face, “for he was afraid to look upon God” (v. 6). Only then did the Lord reveal the purpose of His personal “descent” into the world (v. 8): To save His people Israel and bring them to the Land of promise.

God’s manifest personal involvement in Israel’s redemption would extend beyond His call of Moses (v. 12). As the “Destroyer” He would pass throughout the Land of Egypt and strike their firstborns (12:12-13, 23). As an “angel,” in the form of the pillar of fire and cloud, He would appear in order to guide Israel and to protect her from the Egyptian counterattack (13:21-22; 14:19). As the “Commander of the LORD’s armies,” He would direct the attack on Jericho (Josh. 5:14-6:5); even as God had promised Moses that His

away from the city, he addresses “them” in the singular, calling them “*Adonai*” (v. 18), just as Abraham had addressed the LORD in chapter 18. Lot, in turn, is answered by an individual, who promises to destroy the city only after Lot has gotten to safety (vv. 21-22).

¹⁹ Compare “the Angel of His presence” (*Mal’akh Panav*) in Isa. 63:9, referring to God’s saving presence at the time of the Exodus (see below). For the use of the term with human envoys see Gen. 32:3 (Heb. v. 4); Num. 20:14; Josh. 7:22; et al..

²⁰ Compare Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-15; Exod. 3:2-4, 6; Num. 22:22-35; Judg. 6:11-16, 22; 13:3-21. The only exceptions are found in post-exilic texts, Haggai 1:13 and Malachi 2:7, as the context of each makes clear.

²¹ Compare the later revelation to Joshua by “the Commander of the LORD’s army,” who accepts Joshua’s worship and issues an identical command (Josh. 5:14-15). The subsequent narrative (6:1-5) confirms that this Person is, in fact, the LORD Himself who issues Israel’s marching orders for the attack on Jericho.

Angel—“in whom is My Name”—would lead Israel into her inheritance and expel her enemies (Exod. 23:20-23).²²

God Incarnate: The Davidic Messiah

All the above physical manifestations of God were temporary theophanies for the revelation of His will and the execution of His redemptive purposes. Though temporary and limited in scope, such divine appearances provided the archetype for the ultimate revelation of God’s unique unity and the fulfillment of His plan of salvation in the person of the divine-human Messiah. In contrast to the various theophanies discussed previously, the temporary assumption of physical form is not the focus of Messianic expectation, but rather a true “incarnation”—God literally taking on humanity through conception and birth. In the revelation of the Messiah, based on the Davidic Covenant and detailed in the prophets, the pattern of divine intervention in our world reaches its logical, and yet stunning, consummation.

The Scriptures hinted at the coming of a Redeemer from the moment that redemption became necessary and repeatedly during the pre-monarchial period.²³ With the establishment of David’s kingdom, the promise became firmly attached to his dynasty by divine covenant (II Sam. 7:12-15; cf. Psalm 89:1-4 [Heb. 2-5]). The Chronicler provides an interpreted version of this covenant promise some 500 years later (I Chr. 17:11-14), which incorporates the prophetic revelation concerning the Davidic Messiah to his time. While the Chronicler recognizes the Redeemer’s physical descent from David, he also affirms His divine nature and eternity. For in this version God declares,

“I will be his Father, and he shall be My son;... And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever.”

In contrast to II Samuel, the Chronicler does not limit the Father-son relationship to a disciplinary one, but leaves it undefined and, by implication, inclusive.²⁴ This is parallel to Psalm 2 which refers to “His Messiah” (*Meshicho*) as “My Son” who will rule the “ends of the earth” with “an iron scepter” (vv. 2, 7-9). The divine nature of the “Son” is confirmed by the prediction of His everlasting rule in the kingdom and in the very house of God. The latter parallels Ezekiel’s description of the returning “glory of the LORD” personified, establishing the throne of His kingdom in the restored temple (Ezek. 43:4-7).

The Chronicler’s interpolations reflect the prophetic revelation concerning the divine-Davidic Messiah, as exemplified by Isaiah 9:6-7 [Heb., vv. 5-6].

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.
And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince

²² Note the interchange in this passage between the “Angel” and God, who speak and act as one; even to the point that the “angel” has the prerogative to forgive—or not to forgive—disobedience. Cf. Isa. 63:9.

²³ Gen. 3:15; 49:10-12; Num. 24:17; Deut. 18:15-19.

²⁴ The term “son(s) of God” in the Tanach clearly points to a superhuman (at least) figure. Besides the general usage of the plural for angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), the “son of God” appearing in Daniel 3:25 was clearly utterly different from the three men in the furnace. The implication is that the “son” shares, at least to a certain extent, in the nature of the designated “father”; in this case, God Himself.

of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

Here the future Redeemer of Israel is clearly a human child, born of the lineage of David the king and therefore able to sit on his throne. And yet, as the Chronicler later saw, this "son of God" would be no mere mortal, but would rule "from that time on and forever."²⁵ These statements are accompanied by a startling list of personal names which leave no doubt as to the essential deity of the child to be born.

When God declared His name to Moses, "I am that I am" (Exod. 3:13-14), He revealed the essential significance of His covenant name YHWH and thereby made a direct statement about His true nature as the eternal, self-existent source of all being. Later God's covenant faithfulness is reinforced repeatedly by the statement, "I am the LORD" (cf. Exod. 6:2-8), the eternal—and therefore unchanging—One (cf. Mal. 3:6).²⁶ In the same way, the divine nature of the Messianic King is emphatically asserted through the names by which God has declared He shall be called.

While each of the names given contributes to the identification of the Davidic Messiah as truly God,²⁷ perhaps the most significant in the context of Isaiah is "Mighty God" (*El Gibor*). This name, in its precise form, appears only twice in all of Scripture, here and in Isaiah 10:21; both part of the larger "Book of Emmanuel" section of Isaiah (chapters 7-12).

In Isaiah 10:20-21 Israel's future national repentance and reliance on God alone for deliverance is promised: "The remnant of Israel...will rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth." This is followed immediately by a poetic restatement in the words, "A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to [the]²⁸ Mighty God." The identification of "Mighty God" with "the LORD" as the object of Israel's trust and the agent of her redemption is directly parallel to the declaration concerning the Davidic Messiah, "Mighty God", in 9:6. The Messiah would be the literal embodiment of the Lord Himself,²⁹ carrying out God's redemptive work for Israel.

The consummation of the divine-human Messiah's work, and the necessity of a true incarnation, is seen in Zechariah 12. As a description of the last days, this chapter reveals in specifics the circumstances leading to Israel's national turning to the Mighty God, as seen above. With "all the nations of the earth" gathered against Israel (12:3), God will

²⁵ Note the parallels between this passage and Micah 5:2-5a [Heb., vv. 1-4a], where the King's origins are said to be in "Bethlehem" (the Davidic connection), and yet "from eternity;" and his rule of peace "to the ends of the earth" (cf. Psalms 2:8-9; Zechariah 9:9-10).

²⁶ Similarly, in the renaming of Abram and Jacob (Genesis 17:5; 32:29), God was making a true declaration about their persons. Cf. also Isaiah 7:14, "Emmanuel."

²⁷ For "Wonderful Counselor," cf. Isaiah 40:16; Judges 13:18. Father of Eternity—i.e. the Eternal One, cf. Micah 5:2; Isaiah 41:4. Prince of Peace, cf. Micah 5:5a (Hebrew 4a); Isaiah 45:7.

²⁸ The addition of "the" in the English translation is misleading, giving the impression that a descriptive term, rather than a name, is intended.

²⁹ Cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6, where the Davidic Messiah is also called "The LORD our Righteousness" (*YHWH Tzidkeinu*). Cf. also Exodus 23:20f., "My name is in him."

enable Israel's national repentance by the outpouring of His Spirit, so that, "they will look unto Me Whom they had pierced, and they will mourn..." (12:10). As a result, "in that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (13:1).

Once again, God Himself is speaking: He is the one who intends to destroy the invading nations, and He will pour out "the Spirit of grace and supplication" on Israel (12:9-10a). To Him, "whom they had pierced,"³⁰ will Israel look for deliverance in her time of greatest need.³¹ Without giving the details of the "piercing" or its significance (see Isaiah 53), the true physical embodiment of God is evident. God had taken human form and had been assaulted physically, apparently unto death as the subsequent mourning indicates (12:10b-14; cf. Dan. 9:26).

The universal national repentance over this act—however it was carried out—is what will lead to Israel's national cleansing (12:10-13:1), making her "savable" as God Himself desires. Thus, the death of the God-man Messiah has become a crucial link in the divine plan of salvation, leading to the ultimate redemption of Israel on the day when "the LORD will go forth to fight against those nations" and "His feet will stand...on the Mount of Olives" (14:3-4).

The Divine Unity and the Deity of Messiah

The unity of the Godhead is without question the central theological teaching of the Tanach. And Israel's context—religious and social—demanded the clearest possible communication of this truth by Moses and the prophets. But the truth of God's unique unity was not compromised to achieve polemical ends. Personal distinctions were revealed as not only part and parcel of the true nature of the Godhead, but also as essential elements in the revelation and execution of the plans and purposes of God our Savior.

From the beginning, God purposed that a perfect man in the image of God would rule the earth as God's representative (Gen. 1:26). Following man's fall and the marring of the divine image in him, such a purpose could only be fulfilled by the divine-human Messiah, who "had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa. 53:9). Moreover the redemption of mankind from sin and its effects, which God alone—"apart from [Whom] there is no savior" (Isa. 43:11)—could accomplish, required a sacrificial death that only a man could suffer. In His infinite wisdom and His infinite love, the one true God took on true humanity in order to offer up an infinite sacrifice to Himself on behalf of all mankind. And He will return in His glorified human body to complete the redemption, restoring the physical world and taking His throne as God and King forever.

"And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—"The LORD is one," and His name one" (Zech. 14:9).

³⁰ "Whom" (*'et asher*) identifies the subject (or object) of one action as object of another action (cf. Jer. 38:9; also Prov. 3:12; Deut. 5:11). "Pierced" (*dakaru*) always appears (12x) in its literal, not a figurative, sense (cf. Zech. 13:3).

³¹ To "look unto Me" (*hibitu 'elai*; not *'alai*, "upon Me") has the sense "to turn to for help." See the parallels in Psalm 121:1 and Numbers 21:9.

Noam Hendren
PO Box 2803,
40300 Kfar Yona, Israel
Noamhen54@gmail.com