

Focus on the Kingdom

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You Judge for Yourself! The Shocking Contradiction of the Bible by Evangelical Scholars

"Jesus is not the Son of God because He was born of a virgin."

These are the words of evangelical scholar Dr. Adrian Rogers. The pressure of "orthodoxy" and toeing the line of what is acceptable "in church" has driven him to a very obvious negation of the plain words of Gabriel to Mary. In Luke 1:35 we have a simple, unifying explanation of how, why and when Jesus is the Son of God. It was precisely because of the biological miracle worked in Mary that Jesus is the Son of God. God became the Father of the Son of God by miracle. Here are the words of Luke and Gabriel, to be carefully compared with the words of Adrian Rogers which contradict them (rather obviously, we suggest)!

Unpacking the meaning of the virgin birth, Gabriel said, "For this reason precisely (*dio kai*), the one to be begotten will be called the Son of God." Gabriel offered no other reason, because there is no other basis for Jesus' origin as the Son of God. To *be called* the Son of God is of course the same as to *be* the Son of God. Compare: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they **will be called** the sons of God" (Matt. 5:9) with "Your reward will be great and you **will be** sons of the Highest" (Lk. 6:35).

Jesus is, according to this transparently clear teaching of Gabriel to Mary, the Son of God for the sole reason that God is his Father by miracle. Show this to your friends. Adrian Rogers states the very opposite.

Equally in blatant collision with Gabriel is the bold assertion of Chuck Swindoll and Roy Zuck, general editors of *Understanding Christian Theology*. They write: "Christ has existed eternally as the Son of God... Whenever the title Son of God is used it speaks of his divine essence... **When the title Son of God is used of Christ, it has nothing to do with his birth to Mary. As Son of God he was not born...**" (p. 570).

Now let us hear Gabriel again in Luke 1:35. In answer to Mary's trusting and touching inquiry as to how she might become pregnant, not being married, the angel said, "Holy spirit will come over you and the power of the Highest One will overshadow you. **For that reason precisely (*dio kai*), the one begotten will be called holy, Son of God.**"

I trust our readers will ponder the *amazing* rejection of the plain teaching of Scripture by leaders claiming to

represent the Bible. The angel provides a concise explanation as to why and how Jesus is the Son of God. A huge lesson can be learned from this unaccountable contradiction of the sacred text. Could anything demonstrate more clearly that "church" is at odds with the biblical definition of Jesus as Son of God?

This deviation from the plainest Bible teaching about who Jesus, the Son of God is, ought to be stirring our readers into an impassioned defense of the sacred text. For our blessing and enlightenment, God provided through Gabriel a simple, clear definition of what it means for Jesus to be God's Son. Paul repeated this definition in Romans 1:3-4: "God's Son is the lineal descendant of David [as in Luke 1:35]. He was declared to be the Son of God *in power* by the resurrection." Do not make the mistake of turning a blind eye to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God originally by divine miracle in Mary. He was announced as Son of God also at his baptism. The *origin* of that unique sonship is the miracle worked in the Jewess Mary. Matthew spoke in complete harmony with Luke by describing the origin (*genesis*) of the Son in Matthew 1:18. The Father begat the Son ("that which is begotten in her") by a divine intervention in Mary (Matt. 1:20, note the Greek "begotten," not "conceived" which is the part of the mother). ♦

The "Hebraic Roots" Regression to Moses: The Peril of Rewriting Scripture

by David Maas

The push to use key Hebrew words and names instead of English terms (or Spanish, French, etc.), along with ideological and doctrinal factors, has produced voices claiming the New Testament was originally penned in Hebrew. This becomes a "slippery slope" by which the unwary slither into far more serious traps.

The mistaken insistence on using Hebrew terms stands in stark contrast to the Greek New Testament. Not once do the authors of the New Testament use the Hebrew form of "Jesus." Without hesitation the New Testament uses the *Greek* form, or "Iesous" ("Yeesoos" in modern Greek pronunciation) more than nine hundred times, the Greek word for "God" or *theos* (1,300+ times) and "Lord" or *kyrios* (700+ times). The Hebrew equivalents for "God" (*elohim, el, eloah*) and "Lord" (*adonai*) are never used. Similarly, although "Messiah" transliterated into Greek letters is found twice in the

Gospel of John (1:41, 4:25), its Greek equivalent “Christ” or *Christos* is used approximately 530 times. Furthermore, both John 1:41 and 4:25 translate “messiah” for that gospel’s original Greek-speaking audience (“which is, being interpreted, Christ”).

A subtle rejection of New Testament Scripture underlies any attempt to avoid these simple facts.

The New Testament provides examples of early church leaders speaking Greek, such as Paul on Mars Hill where he even quotes a pagan Greek poet (Acts 17:22-31, 21:37), to make his point. Acts describes Hellenized Jews in the early church who spoke Greek including Stephen (Acts 6:1-6). Though the New Testament provides clear evidence that Jesus spoke Aramaic (Mark 15:34), there are indicators he also spoke at least some Greek (John 12:20-24). And how, for that matter, did Jesus communicate with the Syrophoenician woman if he did not understand Greek (Matt. 15:22, Mark 7:26)? She is identified as both Canaanite and Greek (*Hellénis*), that is, a Hellenized Gentile.

The New Testament provides no basis at all for insisting on the strict use of Hebrew forms of names and terms. It evidences no hesitation on the part of the early church to use Greek or other non-Hebraic terms and languages when necessary for gospel dissemination. If anything, the early church used all the linguistic tools at its disposal to great effect. As Paul wrote, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the Law as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law...I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:20-22).

What is the evidence for the original language of the New Testament? First, all surviving ancient manuscripts of the New Testament or parts thereof are in Greek.¹ Second, because Christianity was a missionary-oriented religion the New Testament was translated into other languages as needed such as the Syriac, Latin and Coptic versions. **These are all translations from Greek originals, not Hebrew.²**

Third, the church fathers of the late first and early second centuries wrote letters in Greek in which they alluded to or quoted passages from the New Testament, also in Greek (e.g., 1 Clement, the Didache, Barnabas, Polycarp of Smyrna and the Shepherd of Hermas).³ Fourth, the New Testament gives no indication of being a

translation. A document of any length translated from one language into another includes signs that it is a translation. This is especially so with languages as fundamentally different as Greek and Hebrew.⁴

Fifth, we should take note of the New Testament’s frequent use of the Greek Septuagint. The majority of verbal allusions and quotations from the Old Testament in the New are from the ancient Greek translation known as the Septuagint, not from the original Hebrew, though some authors used both (e.g., Matthew and Paul). As Kurt and Barbara Aland wrote, “The fact that from the first all the New Testament writings were written in Greek is conclusively demonstrated by their citations from the Old Testament, which are from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and not from the original Hebrew text. This is true even of the rabbinic scholar Paul.”⁵

This fact needs to be emphasized far and wide as an antidote to the very uninformed information being distributed in some quarters — often by people who are much less than qualified to judge in specialist matters.

Sixth, the New Testament itself translates Aramaic and Hebrew terms into Greek for its original Greek-speaking audience (e.g., Mark 15:34: “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’”, Matt. 27:46, 1:23, Mark 5:41, 15:22, John 1:38, Acts 4:36). Seventh, the authors of the New Testament utilized aspects of the Greek language. The examples of this are too numerous to list but include alliteration, wordplays and synonyms, double and even triple negatives, and compound words — features that are difficult to explain if the Greek New Testament was translated from a Hebrew original into Greek.

Eighth, the New Testament books reflect the skill levels and personalities of each individual author. This is often lost in translation into English, Spanish, French, German, etc. The books of the New Testament reflect the varying abilities and skills with Greek, rhetoric and so on. The different authors possessed differing literary skills, according to training and background, just as it is today. If a later hand translated these books from Hebrew into Greek it would be difficult to duplicate the individual characteristics of each New Testament author with consistency. The tendency would be to correct clumsy syntax and grammatical errors.

The ninth is a practical point. The early church was focused on *missionary activities* (Matt. 24:14, 28:18-20). They were centered, as Christians always ought to be, on spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom. By the first century

¹ Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp. 36-66; Philip Comfort, *Early Manuscripts & Modern Translations of the N.T.*, Baker, 1990.

² Metzger, *The Text of the NT*, pp. 67-81; Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1977; Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1989, pp. 185-221.

³ Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 39-67.

⁴ Aland, p. 52; A.T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek NT*, Broadview Press, 1934, pp. 76-139.

⁵ Aland, p. 52.

Hebrew had fallen into disuse even among Palestinian Jews. Because of the spread of Hellenism and the Greek language under the earlier Greek kingdoms, the Greek language was spoken throughout the Roman world, especially in the eastern half of the Empire. Greek became the standard language of commerce. It was so widespread that Roman magistrates commonly published edicts in both Latin and Greek, though Latin was the official language of the Roman government. While not everyone in the Empire spoke Greek, it was used more widely than other languages. For a new religion committed to spreading its message to peoples of every nation and culture, Greek would be the most obvious and practical choice for a medium of communication. Hebrew would be a most impractical option.

The use of Hebrew terms today may sound “authentic,” even learned. But it is a cover for an insidious downgrading of the Greek inspired Scripture which God has given us.

As for the evidence for a Hebrew original; first, there are no existing ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the New Testament. Second, there are no ancient translations from Hebrew originals into Syriac, Latin, Coptic, etc. Third, while several later church fathers claimed Matthew was written in Hebrew, all were dependent on an unsubstantiated and ambiguous quotation from Papias of Hierapolis reported by a church historian approximately two hundred years after Papias’ death.⁶ Since Papias’ writings were all lost in the distant past, the accuracy of Eusebius’ brief and enigmatic quotation cannot be independently verified. Fourth, there is again a practical point. In light of Jesus’ command to preach the Gospel to all nations, writing or translating the church’s core documents into Hebrew would make little sense.

We are concerned that some who are drawn into the pseudo-learning which goes beyond the testimony of the Greek New Testament may be lured into an unfortunate and ultimately self-defeating cult mentality.

What is noteworthy about claims of a supposed Hebrew original New Testament is the lack of substantive evidence for it. The idea of a Hebrew original cannot explain why several New Testament authors transliterated Aramaic (or Hebrew) terms into Greek letters and then translated them for a Greek-speaking audience. And the extensive use of the Greek Septuagint in the New Testament makes no sense if the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew!

In summary, the evidence for Greek as the original language of the New Testament is substantial, extensive, even overwhelming. In contrast, the evidence for a Hebrew or Aramaic original is virtually non-existent and

amounts to an ambiguous and uncorroborated quotation from Papias of Hierapolis, which at most hints at the possibility of an Aramaic or Hebrew original of the Gospel of Matthew only.

Why does all this matter? Included in claims that the New Testament was originally penned in Hebrew are insinuations that the Greek New Testament contains “corruptions,” pagan ideas introduced by the later and largely Gentile church. It then becomes necessary to “correct” such alleged corruptions utilizing the (non-existing!) Hebrew original. We repeat: there is no Hebrew “original”; there is no Hebraic exemplar or existing copies of it that can be used to “correct” the Greek New Testament. At best proponents of this claim can only speculate on what they presume, think or hope the Hebrew “original” said. This is mere guesswork and it confuses and divides.

Where real evidence of corruption in a few verses of the New Testament exists, scholarship has every right to investigate, as has already been very thoroughly done. The least helpful procedure is for persons who have little or no formal training in biblical language to pontificate!

The real Satanic agenda: to undermine Christian confidence in the Greek New Testament as Holy Scripture, to leave believers with almost nothing to stand on, for if we do not have reliable and accurate copies of what Jesus and the Apostles taught, then we do not have an objective and dependable source for right Christian conduct and belief. At that point Christianity disappears, since its inspired authority has been removed!♦

Elohim and Other Key Terms The Danger of Confusing the Doctrine of God by Inventing Our Own Definitions and Vocabulary

“It is as dangerous to get it [the Trinity] wrong as it is difficult to get it right.” — Morgridge

“At the Trinity reason stands aghast and faith itself is half confounded.” — Bishop Hurd

“Nothing to support the dogma [of the Trinity] can be pointed out in Scripture.” — Luther

The Importance of Our Topic

At present the world is deeply divided over who God is. Millions of Jews and over a billion Muslims are alike repelled by the historic Christian doctrine that God is **three in one**. As long as that central tenet is maintained it fosters a religious hostility between peoples of the world faiths. Our difficulties as a human race are firstly theological. We are hopelessly disunited on the issue of who God is. Collectively we do not know how to define God. Thus we do not know which God to serve. And we have apparently forgotten that Jesus was a Jew reciting, as his most precious doctrine, the *Shema*: “Hear O Israel:

⁶ Floyd Filson, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Adam & Charles Black, 1971, p. 16.

the Lord our God is One Lord" (reading the Greek LXX of Deut. 6:4, cp. Mark 12:28ff), which as everyone should know is a **unitarian creed**.

At stake is the central question of obeying and following the teaching of Jesus. If our God is not the God of the Hebrew Bible, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and of Jesus himself, are we floundering in the chaos of polytheism? It is at least worthwhile to explore that threatening possibility. In so doing we may be able to confirm our salvation and rejoice in the truth as Jesus taught it. No considerations of party loyalty, "what we have always believed," "what my church says," or fear of standing alone should deter us for one second from the Berean exercise to which we are all committed (Acts 17:11). God is to be worshiped, Jesus said, "in spirit and truth." Error can only obstruct our relationship with God. Confusion over who God is inevitably reaps a reward of confusion and debilitation in our lives, which are strong only in so far as truth is their dynamic foundation. Jesus was not kidding when he warned that understanding the Lord our God as one single Lord is the proper basis for our theological and Christian lives and witness (Mark 12:28-34; John 4:24).

Now consider the current situation, as tradition has bequeathed it to us. "Distinguished but undivided, bound together in otherness, **one in three**: that is the Godhead and **the three are one**" (Credo of Gregory of Nazianzus, AD 381). This language is still heard in Roman Catholic liturgy. It presides over evangelical churches of all sorts. Thus Hans Kung has spoken of "the unbiblical, very abstractly constructed speculation of the Roman Catholic treatises" and "the **Hellenization** of the Christian primordial message by **Greek theology**." He expresses "the genuine concern of many Christians and the justified frustration of Jews and Muslims in trying to find in such formulas the pure faith in one God."

Amen! Claus Westerman said, "The question of relationships of the persons in the Trinity to one another and the question of the divinity and humanity in the person of Christ as a question of ontic [having to do with 'essence'] relationships could only arise when **the Old Testament had lost its significance for the early church**. The Christological and Trinitarian questions structurally correspond to the **mythological questions into relationships of the gods to one another in a pantheon.**"⁷

Is anyone alarmed, or is the status quo to continue without a batting of the eyelids? When did intelligent evangelicals last inspect the "books" of their church?

Does the creed definitely reflect a creed which Jesus could have wholeheartedly approved and proclaimed?

A Mother of Muddles: A Confusion over the Bible's Word for God

One does not have to advance very far into Scripture to arrive at the word God, with a capital G (although in the original there are no capitals as distinct from lower case). "In the beginning **God** created..." We confront here the Hebrew word *Elohim* followed by a verb which is singular ("he," not "they" created).

In **G.T. Armstrong's** paperback of 1977, *The Real Jesus*, the author announces that "it is time you met the real Jesus" (p. 1). Armstrong investigates the birth narratives. After a spirited description of the human being, Jesus of Nazareth, we learn that the Creator, obviously here not Jesus but *the Father*, was announcing the birth of His Son through three different groups of individuals. Surprisingly, the visitation of Gabriel to Mary declaring **the basis on which Jesus might be called Son of God**, that is, by the procreating activity of the Father (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20), is *completely bypassed* in Ted Armstrong's account. We are immediately, however, plunged into a chapter entitled "Jesus the Creator — His Former Life."

Jesus in his former life, we are told, had spoken to Abraham in Genesis 18. Jesus, said Mr. Armstrong, was not understood by his opponents when he spoke of Abraham having looked forward to his appearance (p. 14). "Jesus was thinking in another dimension — the full knowledge and awareness of who and what he was, of his spiritual background and timelessness." Armstrong then moves from Abraham to John 1:1: "There are two other important Scriptures relative to Christ's preexistence: 'In the beginning God created...' (Gen. 1:1) and 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.'"

Now I do not wish in any way to come over as "smart" or condemning, but what follows in *The Real Jesus* sets out a whole theology which has had dramatic consequences for the education and spiritual journeys of countless thousands of people over some 70 years. G.T. Armstrong says: "The Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*. It is an interesting word with a plural form (the -im ending)." "A little research," says Mr. Armstrong, "demonstrates that *Elohim* can indicate **more than one person**; and can be taken to mean a **family of persons**." Our author goes on: "*Elohim* means *more than one* and while not necessarily limiting the number, many other texts prove there was the Father (whom no man has ever seen at any time) and the Son. Therefore in our modern English language, the beginning text of the Bible would be more understandable if it were written thus: 'In the

⁷ From *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine, A Dialogue Between Pinchas Lapide and Jurgen Moltmann*, Fortress Press, 1981, pp. 40, 41.

beginning **the family of God**, consisting of the Father and the Son, created the heaven and the earth.””

Presumably it would follow that the thousands of appearances of that same word Elohim in the Hebrew Bible are likewise, according to the Armstrong scheme, mistranslated, and really mean “the one God-Family.” The proposal is surely a momentous one setting the standard for an entire theology. At the same time this proposal claims to correct all the standard translations of Scripture. Was G.T. Armstrong equipped to instruct the entire modern academy of theology? Would not common sense itself suggest otherwise?

The die is now cast. We are launched, I think, into polytheism, based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the facts of the Hebrew language — the use of the word Elohim.

I would invite you to pause and reflect on what is happening here. Let us ask this question: Since the Bible was translated into English from Hebrew and Greek in hundreds and hundreds of translations into hundreds and hundreds of languages, has any single translator or committee of scholars who rendered the sacred text from the Hebrew, *at any time*, proposed or sanctioned that translation, which our author, who would claim no specialist training in language modern or ancient, offers us: “In the beginning *the family of God, Father and Son*, created the heavens and the earth”?

Armstrong goes on: “The Hebrew word *elohim* in Genesis 1:1 means that there **was more than one member of the God family** involved in the creating... The Word of John 1 was the executive member of the Godhead of whom the Bible says all things were made by him. Perhaps the clearest description absolutely proving that the Jesus Christ of the New Testament was the same Being who was the Eternal Creator of the Old Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is Colossians 1:16...The Bible clearly shows, without any interpretation or exegesis, that the creator being who is called ‘God’ (*Elohim* or *Yahweh*) in the Old Testament is the same individual who became the Jesus Christ of the New Testament...The personage who emptied himself and became flesh, born of the virgin Mary to become the baby Jesus in Bethlehem was the *same individual* who created Adam, who saved Noah, who appeared to Abraham. He was the *same personality* of the Godhead or God family who wrote the 10 commandments and ruled Israel. The Bible **absolutely proves** the fact that Jesus Christ of the NT is the same person as the God of the OT” (p. 18, emphasis added).

If we now review the information presented in *The Real Jesus*, we have been told that:

- 1) Elohim is plural in meaning
- 2) It means the Family of God

3) It means one member of that family, the one who became Jesus.

There are a number of serious problems with these declarations. If Elohim is plural in *meaning* then it should always be translated **Gods**. In this case it would refer to two or more Gods. A word cannot mean both God *and* Family. This would be to assign two completely different meanings to the same word. If the Bible wanted to speak of the Family of God it could do this quite easily, as for example the “family of David,” “family of Egypt.” There is a perfectly good Hebrew word for family, but the Creator is nowhere said to be a Family of Persons.

However, if Elohim means “family,” and yet is a plural word, why should it not be rendered “families”? And if it means in Genesis 1:1 “Gods,” or *Family* of God, how can it *also* refer to *one* single member of that family, Jesus Christ?

A number of more serious problems arise on these premises: If Elohim is plural and thus means **Gods** then what is the significance of the *singular* verb following (“he [not they] created”)? We would have to translate, “In the beginning Gods, he created” or “**Gods was** the creator.” We are rapidly reducing the sacred text to nonsense.

Have readers who were once persuaded by the Armstrongs realized that they may have been induced into reading and speaking and even teaching *nonsense* as biblical truth? Did not many invest their precious earnings in support of this brand of “theology”?

What we are seeing here is a highly problematic shifting of definitions, which in *every other field* would be detected and recognized as a form of confusion and deception. What Mr. Armstrong presents is a grammatical method in which all sorts of grammatical laws, rules and definitions are thrown aside. Dictionaries and lexicons are discarded as unnecessary and imagination is given free rein. A kind of mystical grammatical category is created by which an innocent word like *Elohim* has taken on a speculative new dimension, allowing this disaster: that precious monotheism is undermined — and the evidence of standard lexicons and commentaries is allowed no place. Moreover, the Jewish understanding of God (remembering that the sacred oracles were committed to Jews) is arbitrarily and amateurishly overthrown.

If Elohim is really plural in meaning in Genesis 1:1, then it should be translated “In the beginning GODS — he created the heavens and earth.”

Unfortunately, it is by changing, or interchanging, the meaning of words, without notice, that a major piece of disinformation can be created, and millions taken in (both dollars and persons!).

Firstly, then, **Elohim** cannot mean at the same time in Genesis 1:1 three *different* things: 1) Gods, 2) Family of

God and 3) One member of that Family. “Gods” is of course plural, family is a singular word and one member of the family is also singular. To ask the same word in Genesis 1:1 to have all three definitions is utterly impossible. “God” and “family” are quite distinct ideas and cannot possibly be covered by the one term Elohim. Now one *could* argue that Elohim is a **collective noun**, like team, family, committee. But in that case it is not plural — not like teams, families or committees. A collective noun denotes a collection of persons, places or things regarded as one (flock, forest, crowd, committee, jury, class, herd, covey, legislature, battalion, squad, and squadron). The objects collected into one term have some characteristics in common, enabling us to regard them as a group. The words “audience” and “congregation” enable us to gather individuals into a single unit.

But the fact needs to be stated clearly: Elohim is **never in the Bible a collective noun** — never. It is not a “group” word when used of the One God. It does not function like the word “family.” No lexicon lists it as a collective noun.

Peloubet's Dictionary of the Bible (1947) stated the truth: “**The fanciful idea that Elohim referred to a Trinity [or we could add Binity] of persons in the Godhead hardly finds now a supporter among scholars.**”

In what Mr. Armstrong called *The Real Jesus* we were introduced into the realm of grammatical fiction and fancy. We were invited in fact, under the guise of intelligent Bible study, to embrace a pagan godhead consisting of more than one Person.

Twenty years later, when **Ernest Martin** issued his comprehensive account of *The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine* in 1999, the same confusion over God was reinforced and with a greater degree of dogmatism. It is worth observing first, though, an extraordinary assertion of E.L. Martin in regard to the status of the teaching of Jesus. His ultra-dispensationalist point of view represents, I think, a dangerous rejection of Jesus: “**All the teachings Christ gave to the Jews during his earthly ministry within the Old Covenant framework were of no importance to Paul (in matters relating to salvation). Paul did not refer to any of Christ's teachings (other than the bread and wine) given by Christ while in the flesh**” (p. 78).

I invite our readers to ponder this statement long and hard. This amazing dictum would mean that the sermon on the mount and the parable of the sower, the Olivet Discourse, and the rest of Jesus' precious utterances (including his affirmation of the creed of Israel in Mark 12:28-34) are of no interest to the Christian!

This devastating confusion is compounded when E.L. Martin declares: “We need to know what ‘God’ signifies in Scripture...It will be found that both God the Father

and His Son are ‘God,’ yet they are both separate personalities united together in a singular purpose.” Martin then speaks of “confusion regarding who or what ‘God’ really is” (p. 450). “This misjudgment occurs because most people assume the term ‘God’ always means a singular and exclusive Supreme Being.” Now this: “Whether the Greek word *theos* is used to describe the Deity or the Hebrew word *elohim*, it was fully accepted [by the writers of the Bible] that there existed more than one ‘god’” (p. 451). “Elohim is clearly a plural word. The two terminal letters ‘im’ make the word to be plural...Since Elohim is plural, the simple meaning of Elohim is ‘Powers’ or ‘powerful ones.’ However, we will see that when Elohim is governed by a singular verb (which occurs often in Scripture) the stress coalesces the plural meaning into a singular understanding (*but still with plural significance*)” (p. 488). “The plural is fused into meaning a singular ‘group of powers,’ or worded differently ‘a Congregation of Powers.’” “No matter what we have been taught over the years about the singularity of God, the word Elohim is a simple plural. If we wish to use the English word ‘God’ as its translation, we must (to be grammatically harmonious and consistent) *place the letter ‘s’ on our word God throughout the Hebrew Scriptures*” (p. 488).

Martin here proposes a corruption of the Hebrew Bible and accuses, by implication, the writers of the New Testament of ignorance. No New Testament writer ever rendered the Hebrew word for the One God as “*theoi*” (Gods).

Elohim when referring to the One God comes into the inspired Greek of the New Testament (some 1310 times) as *theos* (singular). This proves of course that the translations are all correct when they say “in the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth.” Thousands of singular personal pronouns standing for Elohim, and His other names, can only affirm, massively, the fact that God is a Single, Divine, Personal Being.

Martin repeats himself: “If one wishes to retain the English word ‘God’ one must put an ‘s’ on ‘God’ each time it is used. By stating this I would normally be subjected to ridicule by those who read and know the Hebrew language, because it is evident that in the great majority of cases Elohim, though plural in grammatical construction, is governed by singular verbs and must be understood in a singular manner. Yes, but **I state dogmatically** [here E.L.M. goes into bold print] that the only way to make sense out of the Hebrew in regard to understanding the Godhead is to put the letter ‘s’ on the end of every word translated ‘God’ in the English language if the Hebrew word is Elohim” (p. 490). “[In the Shema] the very text itself says that Elohim ('Gods') is **one**. This cardinal point emphasizes the singularity of the plural word Elohim.” “The Hebrew word ‘one’ can

actually carry the meaning of more than ‘one’ (a single person). Note carefully when Adam was married to Eve they became ‘one flesh’ (*echad*) though they represented two separate personalities (Gen. 2:24)” (p. 495). “The Hebrew word *echad* is more expansive in the plural meaning than that...So the plural Elohim refers to one Godhead made up of many individuals (the Father, the Firstborn and other Sons of God, along with female members, see Proverbs 8:2-31)” (p. 495). “Just what is God? Elohim is the One divine family to which all of us belong” (p. 499).

All this prodigious effort to turn one into two or three or more, of course, began early in church history and continues unabated in some evangelical Trinitarian and especially Messianic Jewish Trinitarian circles. By the time of Origen (c. 185-254) a confusion over God was in full swing. The historical Son of God had been turned into the “eternally generated” Son. This concept was at the heart of the whole traditional creedal system of Roman Catholics and Protestants. It produced the problem that though God is one, yet since the Son is also fully God, somehow two has to be one.

Ernest Martin and Ted Armstrong were unwittingly in the Roman Catholic tradition, a tradition, however, based on arguments about *Elohim*, in fact *rejected* by the best Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars of the biblical languages for many centuries.

Before illustrating some of the ancient debate over Elohim and the supposed plurality in the Godhead (Binity or Trinity), here is the state of play in the third century (a papyrus first published in 1949). Origen is discussing the Godhead with a certain Bishop Heraclides. He wants to check him out and verify his “orthodoxy”:

“Since the bishops present had raised questions about the faith of the bishop Heraclides, so that in the presence of all he might acknowledge his faith, and each of them had made remarks and had raised the question, the bishop Heraclides said: ‘And I too believe exactly what the divine Scriptures say: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through him, and nothing came into existence apart from him.” So we agree in the faith and, furthermore, we believe that the Christ assumed flesh, that he was born, that he ascended into the heavens with the flesh in which he arose, and that he is seated at the right hand of the Father, whence he is going to come and judge the living and the dead, being God and man.’

Origen: I ask you, Father Heraclides, God is the Almighty, the uncreated, the supreme one who made all things. Do you agree?

Heraclides: I agree; for this I too believe.

Origen: Christ Jesus, who exists in the form of God, though he is distinct from God in the form in which he existed, was he God before he **entered a body** or not?

Heraclides: He was God before.

Origen: God distinct from this God in whose form he existed?

Heraclides: Obviously distinct from any other, since he is in the form of that one who created everything.

Origen: Was there not a God, Son of God, the only-begotten of God, the first-born of all creation, and do we not devoutly say that in one sense **there are two Gods** and, in another, one God?

Heraclides: What you say is clear; but we say that there is God, the Almighty, without beginning and without end, containing all things but not contained, and there is his Word, Son of the living God, God and man, through whom all things came into existence, God in relation to the Spirit and man in that he was born of Mary.

Origen: You do not seem to have answered my question. Make it clear; perhaps I did not follow you. Is the Father God?

Heraclides: Certainly.

Origen: Is the Son distinct from the Father?

Heraclides: How can he be Son if he is also Father?

Origen: While distinct from the Father, is the Son himself also God?

Heraclides: He himself is also God.

Origen: And **the two Gods** become one?

Heraclides: Yes.

Origen: Do we acknowledge **two Gods**?

Heraclides: Yes; the power is one.

Origen: But since our brethren are shocked by the affirmation that **there are two Gods**, the subject must be examined with care in order to show in what respect they are two and in what respect the two are one God.”

This today remains the problem for all those who propose that God is in some sense **more than one**. Once the unitary nature of God slipped from the church’s grasp, and once a Trinity or Binity is embraced, it becomes necessary to force that idea back on to the Bible. “Elohim” is the point of attack in this procedure. It is a relief to return to the theology of Jesus in Mark 12:28-34. We will continue, God willing, our investigation in the *Focus on the Kingdom* of September, 2011. ◇

Comment

“As one who has just recently had his eyes opened to the truth of biblical unitarianism, I would like to thank you for the contributions you have made in helping to spread this truth through the books that you have written. They have been of tremendous value to my Christian journey.” — Canada