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THE GOD OF ISRAEL

Throughout all nature there is abundant evidence of the existence of a supreme, intelligent, personal Being.

"The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament showeth his handiwork." (Psa. 19:1)

The fingerprints of this divine Architect are discoverable on all His handiwork; hence the Scriptures assume the existence of this eternal God in whom all live, and move, and have their being.

Being face to face with the fact of God's existence, it behooves us (His creatures) to become acquainted with Him as far as possible. This God of whom we read in the book of nature has given us full and detailed information concerning Himself and His redeeming love in His book of revelation known to us as the Bible. In this holy and infallible record we find detailed statements concerning Him.

The proper approach to our subject is an investigation of the evidence set forth in the *Old Testament*, which by our Jewish friends is called the Tenach. The Hebrew Scriptures having been examined, it is then in order to turn to the *New Testament* to learn the teachings found therein.

The doctrine of the *Old Testament* concerning God and His nature may be summarized under three captions—namely, the Plurality of the Divine Being; the Unity of the Divine Being; and the Trinity of the Divine Being. We shall briefly investigate each of these topics in order. That there is a plurality of Divine Personalities constituting the Supreme Being is seen by the use of the plural noun in the first verse of the Bible: "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The word rendered *God* is in the plural form, as is well-known to all Hebrew scholars. This same form occurs throughout the entire *Old Testament* although there is the singular form of two similar words which, likewise, are used frequently.

In contemplating the crowning work of Creation the Persons of the Godhead are said to have used this language; "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Those who held the conversation were of the same image and likeness; hence, of the same substance. This fact precludes the possibility that this language was spoken to an angel or inferior being. In the light of the facts of the context we must believe that this statement was made by one individual to another or others of the same nature and essence. This passage, therefore, assumes the existence of more than one Personality of the same divine nature and essence.

There are many passages in the *Old Testament* which confirm this position. But, one may ask, does the *Old Testament* teach polytheism—the doctrine that there are many Gods? Most positively, No.

There is another line of thought that runs throughout the *Old Testament* which declares the Unity of the Divine Being. This teaching is clearly set forth in what might be properly called Israel's Great Confession. This passage is translated in the American Standard Version as "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." The original text is: **שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:** (Shema Yisrael Jehovah Elohenu Jehovah echad.) [literally rendered]: "Hear, O Israel: the Eternal our Gods is the Eternal a unity." The word *Elohenu* is a plural noun to which the plural suffix *our* is added and is literally rendered "our Gods." This fact is admitted by Hebrew grammarians.

The word *echad* which is rendered in our Version *one* does, in many contexts, mean one in the absolute sense of the term but in other places it also connotes the idea of unity. For instance, in *Genesis 2:25*, God said that a man, should leave his father and his mother and should cleave to his wife and "they shall become one flesh." Here are two people—two personalities—who are said to be one. This oneness can only be used in the sense of a unity. It is this very word that was employed by Moses in *Deuteronomy 6:4*. In view of these facts, therefore, we must believe that Israel's Great Confession, "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah (or the Eternal) our Gods is Jehovah a unity," meaning that the Plurality of Personalities constituting the Divine Being is one in substance, character, plan, and purpose.

At this point of our investigation the question immediately arises, How many of these Divine Personalities are there? An intimation of the answer to this question may be found in *Numbers 6* in the form of the triple blessing:

"Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee;
 Jehovah make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
 Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

Here the name Jehovah appears three times in this wonderful benediction. Can it be that these three petitions are addressed to three Personalities constituting the Godhead? The answer may be found in *Isaiah 48:16*. A glance at the context of this verse shows us that the prophet was here impersonating the Creator of the universe. After speaking of His great creative activity back in the eternity past and of His providential overruling of human history, this Divine Personality declared: "Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called: I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Yea, my hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spread out the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together, even I, have spoken; yea, I make his way prosperous, come ye near unto me, hear ye this; from the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the *Lord Jehovah* hath sent me, and his *Spirit*" (*Isa. 48:12-16*). Here we see the Lord Jehovah, the Creator of the universe, and the Spirit—three Personalities. From this passage it becomes immediately evident that the prophet Isaiah recognized that there are three Persons constituting the Godhead. This teaching is confirmed by other portions of Holy Scripture found throughout the *Old Testament*.

It is now proper for us to investigate the teaching found in the *New Testament* concerning the Godhead.

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ constantly during His personal ministry spoke of God the Father and of His being on an equality with Him. This teaching is especially brought out forcefully throughout the *Gospel of John*. The writer of this record began his account by declaring, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." According to verse 3 of this chapter, the One who is called the Word is the Creator of the material universe. According to verse 14, the word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.

In various passages of the *New Testament* record we read of the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit. To Him are attributed characteristics possessed by none other than God Himself. The Apostle Paul in *I Corinthians 2:11* declared, "For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God." Here the inspired apostle declared that the Spirit of God comprehends and understands God who is an infinite Being. Only another infinite Being can understand and comprehend another such one. Since the Spirit does understand God, the conclusion is that the Spirit Himself likewise is of the same divine nature and essence as God.

As stated before, there is a divine Unity existing and subsisting between these Personalities constituting the Godhead. This unity is clearly set forth in our Lord's great intercessory prayer recorded in *John 17*. In that great petition He recognized that there is perfect unity between Himself and the Father. On numerous occasions He likewise declared that He and the Father were one. They are two separate Personalities and yet are one in another sense. This oneness can be interpreted only as indicating likeness of nature, substance, character, essence, purpose and the like.

Since the Spirit, according to our Lord's promise, would not take of the things of Himself but rather of Christ and show them to the apostles, we may conclude that He, the Spirit, was of the same nature and essence as God and Christ, because only a divine Being could so efface Himself in giving forth the testimony concerning the other two divine Personalities.

From all this testimony we are driven to the conclusion that there is perfect unity, harmony, and oneness existing in the Godhead.

The third and last phase of this subject which comes up for consideration is the number of divine Personalities as set forth in the *New Testament* teaching. A close perusal of it shows that there are but three such Personalities, just as was indicated in the *Old Testament*. The first hint at the triune nature of God is found in the baptismal scene of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus was coming up out of the water (*Matt. 3:13-17*), the heavens were opened and Jesus saw the Spirit of God coming in the form of a dove and lighting upon Him. At the same time there was a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Here we see the Lord Jesus upon the earth, the Father in heaven, and the Spirit appearing in the visible form of a dove coming upon Him—three divine Personalities.

May I ask each of you, my readers, to accept this triune God and yield loving obedience to Him? In order to do this you must accept the Second Person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, as your personal Saviour who laid down His life for you that you might live. Only in the Lord Jesus is there life. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but is passed out of death into life."