



THE GOSPEL FOR THE POSTMODERN WORLD I:

The “Good News” of the Triune God

FOR THE LAST GENERATION we have been living in a postmodern world. This world claims that there is no absolute, all-embracing truth, reality or authority other than ourselves.¹ The final truth is *me*. The ultimate reality is *myself*. The only supposed authentic authority is *me*, *myself* and *I*. In fact, it is now popular to view human consciousness as God! Over against this pathetically dismal and degrading view is the truth, reality and authority of the gospel (“good news”) for the postmodern world.

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God’s Name and the Plurality of the One God

In the Hebrew Scriptures the most frequent word for the One-and-Only God is *Elohim*. It is used in the Scriptures more than 2,000 times. Strangely, the word *Elohim* is plural and means “gods.” Even more peculiar is the fact that in Hebrew the plural *Elohim* is used with a singular verb — that is, the “gods is” or the “gods am.”^{2, 3} An example of *Elohim* in Scripture is as follows:

And Abram fell on his face: and God [pl. *Elohim*] talked with him, saying, As for *me* [sing.], behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.
— Genesis 17:3, 4, emphasis supplied.

In employing the plural name for the One-and-Only God, the Hebrews must have assumed that God had more than one aspect, attribute and/or manifestation.

The Hebrew understanding of monotheism was further clarified when Moses

led [the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law,] to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush . . . [and spoke, saying,] I am the God [pl. *Elohim*] of thy father, the God [pl. *Elohim*] of Abraham, the God [pl. *Elohim*] of Isaac, and the God [pl. *Elohim*] of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God [pl. *Elohim*]. — Exodus 3:1-6.

In the subsequent discussion “God” (pl. *Elohim*) expressions as

I [sing.] have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . — Exodus 3:7, emphasis supplied.

. . . *I* [sing.] am come down to deliver them . . . — Exodus 3:8, emphasis supplied.

. . . *I* [sing.] have also seen the oppression . . . — Exodus 3:9, emphasis supplied.

. . . *I* [sing.] will send thee . . . — Exodus 3:10, emphasis supplied.

Finally, after Moses asked the question, “What is . . . [your] name?” . . . “God [pl. *Elohim*] said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM . . .”

(Exodus 3:13, 14). In Hebrew this expression occurs as *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. Surprisingly, the root word *hayah* is not a noun used for a name. Rather, it is a verb. Furthermore, the verb *hayah* has three fundamental

meanings: “to be,” “to become” and “to effect.”⁴ The accompanying word *'asher* also has multiple meanings, such as “because, for, so that, that which, when, wherewith, who, whom.”⁵ Thus, for example, the voice from the burning bush declared the divine identity as “I WILL BE/BECOME/EFFECT SO THAT I WILL BE/BECOME/EFFECT.”

The One-and-Only God of the Hebrews was/is the God not only of multiple divine attributes but also of numerous promissory actions. It is for this reason that God accepted and employed the plurality of his name.

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The Tabernacle and the Plurality of the One God

Not long after encountering God at the burning bush, Moses followed God’s instructions and helped lead the Chosen People out of bondage in Egypt. After they reached Mount Sinai, God again spoke to Moses and instructed him to build a Tabernacle as a metaphor for God’s presence, as a promise of his ultimate purpose, and as a place for his people to worship (Exodus 25-27). This Tabernacle was designed to include an Outer Court, an inner first apartment called the Holy Place, and, behind a veil, a second apartment called the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place accommodated the Ark of the Covenant, which held the tables of stone — the Ten Commandments. It also was the place for the mercy seat, for the two cherubim, and for the Shekinah of God’s own presence.

The veil represented the pattern or archetype of Creation. The Holy Place or first apartment held the altar of incense (air), the table of shewbread (earth), and the seven-branched candlestick or menorah (light/fire). Outside the two apartments, in the Outer Court, were the laver, holding purifying water, and the altar of burnt offering (sacrifice). The furnishings of the Tabernacle represented the four elements — air, earth, fire, water — which, in the ancient world, were believed to constitute all Creation.

The overall design of the Tabernacle represented a reclining person. The Most Holy Place represented the head. The Holy Place portrayed the thorax/abdomen and particularly the womb. In the subsequent First Temple the side chambers represented the arms, while the two entrance pillars signified the raised legs. The Tabernacle/Temple thus symbolized God's preparing to himself bring forth a human Son. The Most Holy Place represented God as Being (Father). The Holy Place and Outer Court represented God as Becoming (Son) and Effecting (Spirit).⁶

When the Chosen People reached their Promised Land, the First Temple replaced the Tabernacle, but the metaphors were explicitly maintained. Thus, from the beginning the One-and-Only God assured his people that he would Be for them, Become for them, and Effect for them.

Throughout his existence Jesus Christ himself has both represented and constituted the ultimate Truth, Reality and Authority.

This historical promise was emphatically fulfilled when the one true God was born in a manager in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, and ministered in Israel as the humanly embodied Jesus Christ. Throughout his existence Jesus Christ himself has both represented and constituted the ultimate Truth, Reality and Authority. He was, is and always will be the “Good News” — the Gospel — for all humanity, all life and all Creation.⁷

Endnotes

1. “The essential point is that the meaning of all things is colored by subjectivity, and that for a philosophy or ideology to pretend full objectivity is not only deceptive but also in some cases politically abusive” (*Wikipedia*, s.v. “Postmodern Philosophy,” at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodern_philosophy).
2. See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed. (1997), s.v. Louis F. Hartman, “Eloha, Elohim’ in God, Names of.”
3. See Bernhard Lang, “Why God Has So Many Names,” *Bible Review* 19, no. 4 (August 2003): 48-54, 63.
4. See Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), pp. 38-49.
5. See “*asher*” in Robert Young, Hendrickson Publishers, 1984).
6. See “The First Temple: United Monarchical Period,”
7. See “The Historical Jesus IX: The Gospel According to