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HIS NAME IS "ONE"

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WHEN Zechariah (14:9) states "on that day Yahweh will be one, and his name 'One'" (*bywm hhw' yhyh yhw' h'd wšmw 'hd*), he does not mean that God will have only one name, but that the numeral **אחד** "1" will be the official name of God in the End of Days. This is the plain sense of the passage, and must in any case be correct because God has not one but many names such as El, Elohim, Yahweh, Yah, Adonai, Shaddai, etc. God is also called **אחד** "One" in Job 23:13¹:

Since He is "One," who can thwart Him?
When His soul desires, He acts.

In the *Shema*^c it is quite possible that **אחד** means not only that there is but one God, but also that his name is **אחד** "One": *šm' yšr'l yhw' 'lhyw yhw' h'd* (Deut. 6:4) "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is 'One.'"

Plotinus devotes *Enneads* VI:ix² to a detailed discussion *ΠΕΡΙ ΤΑΓΑΘΟΥ Η ΤΟΥ ΕΝΟΣ*, "Concerning 'The Good' or 'The One,'" opening it with the statement *πάντα τὰ ὄντα τῷ ἐνὶ ἑστῶν ὄντα*, "all things that exist are extant by reason of The One." The One is thus the Creator or Prime Mover. The first Greek known to have identified The God (*ὁ θεός*) with The One (*τὸ εἶν*) is Xenophanes of Colophon (born *ca.* 565 B.C.), whose disciple Parmenides refined the concept (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I:v:12–13).³ The Pythagoreans, in keeping with their numerical preoccupations, made much of the theme that numbers had special, including divine, qualities.

As is so often the case, here too we are dealing with material which was incorporated into Greek philosophy long after it had gained currency in the ancient Near East.⁴ The Mesopotamian evidence happens to be the most detailed at our disposal. The divine "One" (written ^aI), which can designate the god of heaven "Anu," fits into a pattern of deities corresponding to numbers. Thus ^aX often stands for the storm god "Adad"⁵; ^aXV is the goddess "Ishtar"; ^aXX can represent the sun god "Shamash"; ^aXXX is the moon god "Sin"; etc.⁶ In the case of ^aVII^{bi} (often thought to refer to the Pleiades),

¹ *whw' b'hd wmy yšybnw wnpšw 'wth wy's*. The "ב" of predication or equivalence" (like the Egyptian "m [lit., 'in' like ב 'in'] of predication or equivalence") must sooner or later be recognized by Hebraists. Note also *byh šmw* (Ps. 68:5), "His name is Yah," *byh yhw' h'* (Isa. 26:4) "Yahweh is Yah," and *w'r' l-brhm 'l-yšq w'l-y'qb b'l šdy wšmy yhw' l' nwd'ty lhm*, (Exod. 6:3), "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as 'El Shaddai,' but I was not known to them (by) my name 'Yahweh.'" Failing to understand the ב in Job 23:13, M. Pope emends **אחד** to **אחד** in the Anchor Bible (*Job*, p. 156).

² Émile Bréhier, *Plotin: Ennéades VI (1^{re} partie)* (Paris, 1954), pp. 170–88.

³ Hugh Tredennick, *Aristotle: The Metaphysics I–IX* (in "The Loeb Classical Library," [London &

Cambridge (Mass.), 1933], p. 38.

⁴ C. H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York, 1965), p. 153.

⁵ In Akkadian texts written in the West, where Canaanite religion was practiced, ^aX could signify "Baal" (the Canaanite storm god), as shown by the phonetic complement in ^aX^{la} at Ugarit (see, for example, *Ugaritic Textbook*, p. 56, § 8.14).

⁶ Thus ^aXL can designate "Ea"; and ^aL, "Enlil." Note also the main temple at Lagash, *é-L*, pronounced in Sumerian *É-Ninnu* ("House of Fifty"), mentioned repeatedly in Gudea's texts. The ideograms for deities are available in A. Deimel *Sumerisches Lexikon IV*, 1 (Rome, 1950); and René Labat, *Manuel d'Épigraphie Akkadienne*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1963).

the phonetic complement shows that the name was pronounced like the numeral for "seven."⁷ Another numeral-type deity is the double god *as-tab-bi*, "Gemini."⁸

In Egypt a *psd.t*, "ennead", though composed of nine members is often treated as a single entity somewhat like the Christian Trinity. But the great god Amon-Re, Lord of the Universe, is called *w^c w^c* (literally "one, one") "the one 'One.'"⁹

When Zechariah tersely states without any explanation that Yahweh is "One," he is in the tradition of Hebrew directness. When Plotinus explains in detail why and how God is "One," he is in keeping with the Greek tradition we call philosophy. The Hebrew was not interested in proving what he felt to be self-evident, whereas the Greek was impelled to demonstrate his convictions rationally. There were Hebrews, Greeks, and other Near Easterners who believed God was "One." Whether he was called *יהוה*, *w^c*, or *τὸ εἷν* was simply a matter of translation. The nations of the Near East shared a common heritage; what each did with that heritage is its distinctive contribution within the international continuum delineated in Genesis, Chap. 10. The interconnected family (vs. 1) of varied nations might differ linguistically and inhabit diverse regions (vss. 20, 32) but they shared a common background.

The Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hebrew examples of the divine "One" give us the antecedents of "The One" in Aristotle and Plotinus. On the other hand, Greek philosophy is the key to the reasoning behind the concept. Our comparative study meanwhile explains biblical passages whose basic meanings have been unnecessarily obscured¹⁰ by the artificial separation of historically related cultures.¹¹

⁷ This holds whether we read it in Akkadian as *Sibi*, or in Sumerian as *Imina-bi*; see *Orientalia*, 16 (1947), p. 13. Incidentally, Hebrew *שבע*, "Seven," is a divine name in *אל־שבע* ("Seven is divine"), "Elizabeth." "Seven" is either equated or combined with Yahweh in the feminine personal name *Yhw-sb^c* (II Kings 11:2) = *Yhw-sb^t* (II Chron. 22:11). *B^r-sb^c*, "Beersheba," probably means "The Cistern of (the divine) 'Seven,'" and *Qryt-rb^c* (the ancient name of Hebron) probably means "The City of (the divine) 'Four'" with which we compare *arba-ilu*, "Arbela" (now Irbil), meaning "'Four' is God."

⁸ *Orientalia* 16 (1947), p. 13.

⁹ See John N. Oswalt, *The Concept of Amon-Re as Reflected in the Hymns and Prayers of the Rames-*

side Period (a Brandeis University Ph.D. dissertation) University Microfilms (Ann Arbor, 1968); p. 65 (Leiden I 350, col. II, line 2), p. 156 (Papyrus of Nesichons, line 3), p. 247, and note 1 on p. 275.

¹⁰ The interested reader should look up in the latest commentaries the biblical passages discussed in this article.

¹¹ One of the striking links between Near Eastern and Mesoamerican cultures is the deification of numbers. For the phenomenon among the Maya, see J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: Introduction* (Washington, D.C., 1950), p. 12; and Dale Nichols, *The Pyramid Text of the Ancient Maya* (Antigua, Guatemala, 1969).