

HOW MANY IS GOD? AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MEANING OF DEUTERONOMY 6:4–5¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Deuteronomy 6:4 Moses commences the second major section of his second address. The limits of this segment are marked by his call, “Listen, O Israel!” at the beginning, and the warning of Israel’s certain doom at the end, “because you would not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God” (8:20). This demarcation is confirmed by 9:1, which signals the beginning of a new subsection with a third call to “Hear!” (cf. 5:1). Between these two markers, Moses offers a profound exposition of the essence of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh. Moses announces the grand theme of this section in emphatic but eloquent style with the “Shema” in 6:4–5: a call for exclusive covenant commitment to Yahweh.

Moses maintains his covenantal focus throughout this section particularly through the repetition of the phrase “Yahweh your God,” which occurs 31 times, and “Yahweh our God,” which occurs an additional four times, yielding a total of 35 occurrences in 68 verses. The covenant mediator describes this relationship from both sides. On the one hand, he notes Yahweh’s love for Israel (7:7, 8, 13), his faithfulness to his covenant (6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 9, 12; 8:18), and his providential care for them (8:2–16). On the other hand, he emphasizes the response that Yahweh expects from his people: love (6:5); fear (6:13, 24; 8:6); trust (7:17–24); and remembrance (6:12; 8:11, 18, 19); to say nothing of obedience, which is a constant theme.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 represents the thematic introduction to this extended segment of Moses’ second address. This paragraph is probably more familiar to us than any other part of Deuteronomy. The NIV translates it as follows:

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie

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them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

This first subsection of 6:4–8:20 may be the shortest, but it is the most eloquent, and in many ways the most profound. Readers tend to fix their attention on the opening “Hear, O Israel,” but we need to realize that this *šēma*^c is just the first of a series of six imperatives that dominate the paragraph consisting of verses 4–9: “Hear,” “Love,” “Impress,” “Speak,” “Bind,” and “Write.” The two exceptions to this pattern (vv. 6, 8b) are cast in the third person, with inanimate objects as their subject. However, since the words cannot find their place “upon your hearts” (v. 6), nor appear as phylacteries “between your eyes,” by themselves (v. 8b), even these statements have imperatival import.

Moses’ challenge in Deut 6:4 is known as the Shema^c, a designation that derives from the first word in Hebrew.² The Shema^c represents one of the most important symbols of Judaism. In most Hebrew manuscripts the last letters of the first and last words are exceptionally large, presumably to warn the reader that at this point the reading is to be especially precise.³ The LXX prefaces the Shema^c with a long introduction, apparently an adaptation of 4:45:⁴

καὶ ταῦτα τὰ δικαιώματα καὶ τὰ κρίματα ὅσα ἐνετείλατο κύριος τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἐξελθόντων αὐτῶν ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου. . . .

“And these are the judgments that *the LORD* commanded the sons of Israel in the desert when they went out of the land of Egypt. . . .”

The catechetical/liturgical significance of the Shema^c in ancient Judaism is reflected by the fact that it appears immediately after the Decalogue in the Nash Papyrus, a second-century BC liturgical text,⁵ and in a first-century AD phylactery text from Cave 8 at Qumran, where the Shema^c is written in a rectangle and surrounded by other texts.⁶ To this day, orthodox Jews re-

² Although this paper is concerned primarily with verse 4, verse 5 is often treated as part of the Shema^c. This is taken for granted in Paul Foster’s most recent discussion of the forms and use of the Shema^c in the Gospels in “Why did Matthew get the *Shema* wrong? A Study of Matthew 22:37,” *JBL* 133 (2003) 309–33.

³ Thus I. Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (trans. and ed. E. J. Revell; Masoretic Studies 5; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980) 48. To read the final *daledh* as a *resh* (the two letters were often confused) would create a blasphemous *’aḥar*, “another, other.” Alternatively the combination of the two last letters, *’ayin* and *daledh* spells *’ed*, “witness,” suggesting either that the Shema^c is a witness to the unity of Yahweh (Jeffrey Tigay, *Deuteronomy* [NJPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996] 441), or that the Shema is a witness against Israel, in which case it functions like the Song of Moses in 31:19–21. Cf. Ps 50:7, “Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel I will testify against you; I am God your God.”

⁴ So also John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy* (SBLSCS 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 114.

⁵ The papyrus includes a Hebrew version of the long introduction found in the LXX. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2d rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 118; Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. E. F. Rhodes; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 34, 144–45. For a discussion of the nature and liturgical significance of the Shema^c in the Nash Papyrus see Foster, “Why did Matthew get the *Shema* Wrong?” 327–28.

⁶ 8QPhyl; published by M. Baillet, *Les ‘Petites Grottes’ de Qumrân. Exploration de la falaise. Les grottes 2Q, 3Q, 5Q, 6Q, 7Q à 10Q* (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 3; Oxford: Clarendon, 1962)

cite the Shema^c twice daily as part of their prayers in the morning when they wake up, and at night before they fall asleep (cf. the instruction in v. 7).⁷ In so doing they take “the yoke of the kingdom,” which is to say that they place themselves under the sovereignty and kingship of Yahweh.⁸ The Shema^c is as close as early Judaism came to the formulation of a creed.

The importance of the Shema^c in Jewish tradition is also reflected in the Gospels. One day, apparently seeking to change the subject away from the issue of the resurrection, over which the Pharisees and Sadducees were arguing, one of the scribes asked Jesus, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” To which Jesus replied,

The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29–31 ESV)⁹

II. THE PROBLEM OF THE SHEMA^c

Despite the importance of the Shema^c in Jewish and Christian tradition, it is in fact quite enigmatic, and has fueled scholarly discussion out of all proportion to these six small words.¹⁰ The style and meaning of the first two words are clear—a vocative addressing Israel (cf. 4:1; 5:1; 9:1; 27:9)¹¹—and

149–51. For discussion of these texts see J. C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 33; L. H. Schiffman, “Phylacteries and Mezuzot,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 2.675–77; Foster, “Why did Matthew get the *Shema* Wrong?” 329–30.

⁷ The tradition goes back a long time. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8, 13; *m. Ber.* 1,2,3. There may also be an allusion to the practice in 1QS 10:10, “At the onset of day and night I shall enter the covenant of God, and when evening and morning depart I shall repeat his precepts; and by their existence I shall set my limit without turning away” (as translated by Florentino G. Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* [Leiden/New York: Brill, 1997] 1.95). For discussion see A. R. C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and its Meaning* (NTL; London: SCM, 1966) 239–41, 245.

⁸ According to the Talmud (*Ber.* 15b), “Gehenna is cooled for whoever pronounces the Shema correctly.” For discussions of the Shema^c in early Judaism see L. Jacobs. “Shema, Reading of,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 14.1370–74; S. D. McBride, “The Yoke of the Kingdom: An Exposition of Deut. 6:4–5,” *Int* 27 (1973) 273–306, esp. 275–79; F. E. Vokes, “Creeds in the New Testament,” *SE* 6 (1973) 582–84.

⁹ Neither Matthew (22:37–40) nor Luke (10:26–27) includes the first clause of the Shema^c in the citation. For analysis of the Synoptic issues, especially the variations in the forms of the call for unreserved love for God, see Foster, “Why did Matthew get the *Shema* Wrong?” 309–33.

¹⁰ See most recently L. J. Bord and D. Hamidović, “Écoute Israël (Deut. VI 4),” *VT* 52 (2002) 13–29.

¹¹ A rabbinic tradition reflected in *Sifre Deuteronomy* §31 and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan understands “Israel” as an individual appellation, that is, the patriarch Jacob. This is evident in the latter’s very expansive reading of verses 4–5:

And it was, when the time was reached for our father Jacob to be gathered from the midst of the world, he was afraid lest there be a defect among his sons. He called them and asked them: is there any guile in your hearts? All of them replied as one and said to him: “Hear, Israel, our father,” “the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Jacob answered and said: “Blessed

accord with the oral rhetorical style of the book as a whole. But the construction of the remainder is difficult and without parallel in the entire OT, leading to wide variation in the way translations and commentators render the statement. The following represent the main possibilities that have been proposed:

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one."¹²

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh."¹³

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one."¹⁴

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is One/Unique."¹⁵

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God; Yahweh alone."¹⁶

While the merits of each reading vary, the wide range of interpretations offered by scholars cautions us to deem provisional all solutions to the problem, especially our own.

Following the vocative of address, the Shema^c consists of four nominal elements: the divine personal name Yahweh, which occurs twice; a common noun with the first person plural suffix; and a numeral. On the surface, the four words appear to be arranged in an ABAB parallel order:

<i>Yhwh 'ēlōhēnū</i>	Yahweh our God
<i>Yhwh 'ehād</i>	Yahweh one

be his glorious Name for ever and ever. ⁵Moses, the prophet, said to the people, the Israelites: follow the true worship of your fathers and love the Lord your God following your hearts' inclination even if he take your lives along with all your wealth."

As translated by Ernest G. Clarke, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Deuteronomy* (Aramaic Bible 5B; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) 24–25.

¹² R. W. L. Moberly, "Yahweh is One: The Translation of the Shema," in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 41; Leiden: Brill, 1990) 209–15; J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 137, 141.

¹³ AV, ASV, RSV n., NIV n., JB; N. Lohfink, "אֱחָאֵד 'echādh," *TDOT* 1.196; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 330, 337–38; P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 168–69.

¹⁴ NAS, NIV, RSV; J. G. Janzen, "On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4–5)," *VT* 37 (1987) 280–300; E. H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (NAC 4; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 162–63.

¹⁵ C. H. Gordon, "His Name is 'One,'" *JNES* 29 (1970) 198–99; cf. M. Dahood's "Yahweh our God is the Unique," *Ras Shamra Parallels*, vol. 1 (AnOr 49; ed. L. R. Fisher; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972) 361.

¹⁶ Ibn Ezra, NRSV, NJPS, A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 175–77; T. Veijola, "Höre Israel! Der Sinn und Hintergrund von Deuteronomium VI 4–9," *VT* 42 (1992) 528–41; Tigay, *Deuteronomy* 76. These are not the only possibilities. E. Nielsen ("Weil Jahwe unser Gott ein Jahwe ist' [Dtn. 6,4f]," in *Law, History, and Tradition: Selected Essays by Eduard Nielsen* [Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads, 1983] 106–18) proposes, "Because Yahweh our God is one Yahweh . . . you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart. . . ." For surveys of the most important interpretations of the Shema^c see Cynthia L. Miller, "Pivotal Issues in Analyzing the Verbless Clause," in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. Cynthia L. Miller; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 4–6; O. Loretz, "Die Einzigkeit Jahwes (Dtn 6,4) im Licht der ugaritischen Ball-Mythos," in *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift W. F. von Soden* (ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995) 26–47; Bord and Hamidović, "Écoute Israël" 14–15.

Although a verb is absent, most scholars agree that this should be interpreted as one or two verbless clauses in the present tense. But this is where the agreement ends. While many today interpret the first colon as a clause, “Yahweh is our God,”¹⁷ the NIV follows a longstanding tradition of reading the clause appositionally: “The LORD our God.” This accords with the general pattern by which the name Yahweh (*Yhwh*) and the divine epithet God (*’ēlōhīm*) are juxtaposed in Deuteronomy. R. W. L. Moberly notes that *Yhwh* and *’ēlōhīm* are juxtaposed 312 times in this book. He argues that since the terms always occur in apposition elsewhere, the same must be true here.¹⁸ Furthermore, as Lohfink observes, “. . . when *’ēlohim* is used predicatively after *yhwh*, it is always preceded by *hu’* (Dt. 4:34; 7:9; Josh. 24:18; 1 K. 8:60),”¹⁹ to which Bord and Hamidović add that the designation for deity always adds the article, *viz.*, *hā’ēlōhīm*.²⁰

However, this appeal to the appositional use of “our/your God” is not as convincing as it appears on first sight. First, in response to Bord and Hamidović, inasmuch as the suffixed form *’ēlōhênû*, “our God,” is already definite, the addition of the article is morphologically impossible. Second, the overwhelming number of occurrences of “Yahweh our God,” etc., are found in verbal clauses, with this phrase serving either as the subject of action performed or the object of Israel’s action. Here we have a verbless clause. Third, all recognize the uniqueness of the syntax of the Shema,²¹ so that even if the construction *Yhwh ’ēlōhênû* functions appositionally in 100% of the other cases, usage elsewhere may not override the requirements of the present syntax or context; nor should we disregard the evidence of a potentially single possible exception.

The second colon is more problematic. While a variety of interpretations have been offered, the two main alternatives are “The LORD is one” (as in NIV), or “The LORD alone” (as in NRSV). The primary arguments in favor of the former are two. First, this interpretation of *’ehād*, “one,” follows the normal use of this cardinal number. If “alone” had been intended, the author would have been expected to say *yhwh lēbaddô*, “Yahweh by himself.” Second, this is clearly the interpretation of these words in (1) the Nash Papyrus,²² which adds a pleonastic *hû’* after *’ehād*, that is, *yhwh ’hd hw’*; (2) the Septuagint, which reads, ἄκουε Ἰσραὴλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν, and should be translated, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is one LORD”;²³ and the NT, which follows the LXX precisely.²⁴

¹⁷ Thus NRSV, NAS, NJPS.

¹⁸ R. W. L. Moberly, “Yahweh is One” 209–15.

¹⁹ *TDOT* 1.197.

²⁰ “Écoute Israël” 19.

²¹ Even Janzen, “On the Most Important Word in the Shema” 296.

²² According to Andersen’s Rule #4 for verbless clauses, this yields an unequivocal reading “Yahweh is one.” See Francis I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (JBLMS 14; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) 45.

²³ Wevers (*Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy* 114) treats κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν as a “pendant nominative, whose chief purpose is to identify *Kurios* as Israel’s covenant God.” LXX follows MT in rendering the charge “Hear” as singular, but the plural response reflects a communal voice.

But if this reading is correct, what does the statement mean? Three interpretations are possible. First, this is a reminder that Yahweh the God of Abraham, Yahweh the God of Isaac, and Yahweh the God of Jacob all represented a single deity (cf. Exod 3:6, 15; 4:5). Second, this is a polemical mono-Yahwistic declaration combating the potential poly-Yahwism reflected in names such as “Yahweh of Sinai” (Deut 33:2; cf. Judg 5:5; Ps 68:9), “Yahweh of Mount Paran” (Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3), “Yahweh of Edom” (Judg 5:5), and “Yahweh of Teman” (Hab 3:3).²⁵ Third, this is a declaration of the integrity of Yahweh, a cryptic reference to his internal consistency and fidelity, that is, morally and spiritually he is one.²⁶ According to J. G. Janzen, “God’s ‘oneness’ is the unity between desire and action, between intention and execution.”²⁷

Wevers translates the Greek, “As for the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” He continues, “By adding the linking verb the translator excluded the possibility of understanding b) as the predicate of a).” According to W. Herrmann (“Jahwe und des Menschen Liebe zu ihm zu Dtn. VI 4,” VT 50 [2000] 47) the LXX reads the Hebrew as a verbless clause in which, linked with the numeral “one,” the second element functions as predicate for the proper divine name.

²⁴ On the other hand, it must be noted that in Mark 12:32, in the scribe’s response to Jesus’ citation of the Shema^c, after he has said, “You are right in saying that God is one,” he adds, “and there is none other besides him” (καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν αὐτοῦ).

²⁵ One might also imagine “Yahweh Sebaoth of Jerusalem,” “Yahweh of Bethel,” “Yahweh of Hebron,” “Yahweh of Samaria,” etc. This declaration then accords with the repeated references to Yahweh choosing a single place for his name to dwell (Deut 12). This kind of theological perspective seems to be reflected in four 9th–8th-century BC Hebrew Inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (as translated by P. K. McCarter in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2, *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* [ed. W. W. Hallo; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2000] 171–72):

Utterance of ‘Ashyaw the king: “Say to Yehallel and to Yaw‘asah and to [. . .]: ‘I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah!’”

[. . .] to Yahweh of the Teman and his asherah. And may he grant (?) everything that he asks from the compassionate god [. . .] and may he grant according to his needs all that he asks!

Utterance of ‘Amaryaw, “Say to my lord ‘Is it well with you? I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and his asherah. May he bless and keep you, and may he be with my lord!’”

[. . . May] he prolong (their) days, and be satisfied [. . .] Yahweh of Teman has dealt favorably [with . . .]

For discussion of these texts see M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 118–25; R. Albertz, *The History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 1.206. This perception of Yahweh compares with Mesopotamian references to Ishtar of Arbela, Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Akkad (ANET 205); Egyptian references to Amon-Re in Thebes, Amon-Re in Heliopolis, etc.; and biblical references to Baal of Peor, Baal of Gad, Baal of Tamar, Baal of Maon, Baal of Hermon, Baal of Hazor, etc. These gods were worshiped in many different places, perhaps as local manifestations of the one deity.

²⁶ Lohfink (TDOT 1.197) rightly dismisses C. J. Labuschagne’s contention that Yahweh is being described here as “the One Detached,” that is God lacks both a female consort and a household. Cf. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Pretoria Oriental Series 5; Leiden: Brill, 1966) 137–38.

²⁷ In the second part of the Shema Israel is called upon to reflect God’s spiritual and moral “oneness.” See Janzen’s “On the Most Important Word in the Shema” 287; cf. also *idem*, “The Claim of the Shema,” *Encounter* 59 (1998) 244.

III. SIGNIFICANT FACTORS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SHEMA^C

However, the arguments for the unitary interpretation are weak. Moving centrifugally from the word, to the syntax of the sentence, the immediate context, the broader literary context, and finally to the canonical context, at each level we observe features that raise questions about the traditional interpretation.

1. *The meaning of ʿehād.* In response to those who argue that if “alone” had been the intended sense, the statement would have read, *yhwh lēbaddô*, Weinfeld rightly points out that *lēbaddô* is an adverb. Since the Shema^C consists of nominal clauses (or a nominal clause), this word is inappropriate in this context.²⁸ At the same time, we note that although the dictionary definition of the word ʿehād is indeed “one,” to read something like “alone” here is not as exceptional as many imagine. Scholars have identified a variety of texts scattered throughout the OT in which this word functions as a semantic equivalent to *lēbaddô*, “unique, only, alone”:²⁹

Josh 22:20: With respect to Achan the Israelites say, “Now that man did not perish alone (*ʿehād*) for his iniquity.”

2 Sam 7:23 (= 1 Chr 17:21): David recognizes that as the privileged recipient of Yahweh’s saving grace, Israel is “a unique nation” (*gōy ʿehād*).

1 Chr 29:1: David refers to Solomon as “My son Solomon, the only one (*ʿehād*) whom God has chosen.”

Job 23:13: Job says of God, “But he is unique (*ʿehād*) and who can turn him.”

Job 31:15: Again Job says of God, “And he alone (*ʿehād*) fashioned us in the womb.”

Song 6:9: “But my dove, my perfect one, is the only one (*ʾaḥat ḥiʾ*); the only one (*ʾaḥat ḥiʾ*) of her mother.”

Zech 14:9: “For Yahweh will be king over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be *ʿehād*, and his name *ʿehād*.³⁰

²⁸ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* 338, with acknowledged indebtedness to A. B. Ehrlich.

²⁹ 2 Kgs 19:19: “That the earth may know that you alone (*lēbaddô*) O Yahweh are God”; Isa 2:11, 17: Yahweh alone (*lēbaddô*) will be exalted on that day.” The ambiguity of the Hebrew text of the Shema appears to be eliminated in a recently published Samaritan inscription containing the Shema. This inscription, dated by the publisher G. Davies some time after the fourth century AD, seeks to clarify the meaning of *ʾhd*, “one,” by adding an appositional *lbdw*, “he alone.” See Davies’s “A Samaritan Inscription” 3–19 for full discussion. Less likely is the interpretation of H.-G. von Mutius (“Sprachliche und religionsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zu einer neu publizierten samaritanischen Textfassung von Deuteronomium 6,4,” *BN* 101 [2000] 23–26), who proposes that the Samaritan reading either affirms that Yahweh is different from all other gods on the basis of his unique inner unity or in the fact that he alone has no wife/consort.

³⁰ Counterparts to exclusive use of *ʿehād* may be found in other Near Eastern languages and texts as well. Although the vocabulary is obviously different, attestation of Enlil’s aloneness, uniqueness, exclusivity is reflected in a Sumerian text: “Enlil is the lord of heaven and earth; he is king alone” (cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* [AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991] 338). But nearer home geographically and linguistically, we note the Phoenician statement, *ʾnk lḥdy*,

Some of these examples are admittedly more convincing than others. However, even if they were all rejected (which is unlikely), this would still not rule out the possibility of an exceptional significance in this case. Janzen's claim that the Shema^c refers to Yahweh's internal integrity is forced, and to render *yhwh 'ehād* as "Yahweh is one," in almost any sense is illogical. H. C. Brichto has rightly observed,

A translation affirming that a person known by a proper name 'is one' is as meaningless of a deity as it would be of a human being. A discrete entity is not normally in danger of being taken for more than one or less than one. The assumption that the Hebrew word *'ehad* means 'one' in its every appearance is an example of the folly of literalness. This folly would appear obvious to every speaker of English were he to remember that *only* is 'one-ly' and *alone* is "all-one." The endurance of this mistaken rendering is a tribute to the mischief that has been done to biblical meanings by the substitution of a common noun *lord*, rendered as a proper noun *the Lord*, for the ineffable name YHWH and also to an anachronistic assumption by theists of the biblical persuasion that Moses anticipated the unitarian-versus-trinitarian division.³¹

2. *The syntax of the Shema^c.* With reference to the syntax of the sentence, if the last clause had intended to say "Yahweh is one," as a verbless clause it should have read either *yhwh 'ehād hū'* or *'ehād yhwh*, but not *yhwh 'ehād*.³² Furthermore, if Moses had intended to communicate the "integrous" character of Yahweh, he had several clear and natural expressions at his disposal, including the pattern he follows in Deut 7:9, *yhwh 'elōhēkā hū' hā'elōhīm hā'el hanne'emān*, "Yahweh your God is God, the faithful El." Based on this model, the Shema^c should read, *yhwh 'elōhēkā hū' hā'elōhīm yhwh hā'ehād*, "Yahweh your God is God, the 'integrous' Yahweh."

On lexical and syntactical grounds, therefore, we conclude that two or three English renderings of the Shema^c capture the required sense. First, if

"I only," or "Only I" (DNWSL 34), and especially Baal's quotation of Mot in the Ugaritic text, *KTU* 1.4 vii50–52:

I am the only one who rules over the gods, (*aḥdy dymlk 'l ilm*)
 who fattens gods and men,
 Who satiates the hordes of the earth.

As translated by D. Pardee, "The Ba'lu Myth," in *Canonical Compositions* 263; cf. the translation by N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (2d rev. ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 111. For the Ugaritic text and a similar translation see Mark Smith "The Baal Cycle," in Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 137.

³¹ In *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 232–33. I am indebted to Joe Sprinkle for drawing Brichto's discussion to my attention.

³² As in Sir 42:21: *'hd hw' m'wlm*, "He is one from eternity" (or "one and the same," according to NRSV, and P. Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1987] 484). Cf. Andersen's Rule #3 (*Hebrew Verbless Clause* 42–45). Cf. *hālôm 'ehād hū'*, "the dream is one," in Gen 41:26. The Nash Papyrus and Septuagintal readings made the required adjustments to secure the sense of "Yahweh is one." However, no one argues that these readings are preferable to MT. Those responsible for the Nash Papyrus obviously treasured the Shema^c for its liturgical value, but in adding the pleonastic pronoun to secure the sense of LXX they had to violate Deut 4:2.

one insists on reading the first element, *yhw h ’ēlōhēnū*, in accord with the appositional usage everywhere else in Deuteronomy, the *Shema*^c may be interpreted as a cryptic utterance, “Yahweh our God! Yahweh alone!” If one argues for a nominal sentence in the first element, then “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!” is possible. F. I. Andersen compares the syntax of the first element of *Shema*^c with Isa 33:22, which he translates as in the second column:

<i>kī yhw h šōpētēnu</i>	“For our judge is Yahweh,
<i>yhw h mēhōqēqēnū</i>	our legislator is Yahweh,
<i>yhw h malkēnū</i>	our king is Yahweh;
<i>hū’ yōsī’ēnū</i>	“He will save us! ³³ ”

Third, if one insists on rendering the second element as a nominal sentence, then “Yahweh our God, Yahweh is the only one,” or “Yahweh our God, Yahweh is the one and only,” represent the correct interpretation, even if they express it awkwardly. All accord with the pervasive and fundamental demand of Deuteronomy in general and the first commandment of the Decalogue that Israel worship only Yahweh, and absolutely avoid all other spiritual allegiances.

3. *The immediate literary context of the Shema*^c. This interpretation is reinforced in the immediate context by verses 5–9, where Moses explains explicitly what he means by total and exclusive allegiance to Yahweh. The determinative word here is “love” for Yahweh. As demonstrated in 4:37, Hebrew *’āhab* denotes the fundamental disposition of commitment within a covenant relationship that seeks the well-being and the pleasure of one’s covenant partner, often without regard for oneself. Although passion is obviously not absent from the word *’āhab*, as used in Deuteronomy, this is not primarily an emotional term, but an expression of covenant commitment demonstrated in action.³⁴ Moses will have a great deal more to say about this matter later, but for the moment, in order to grasp his understanding of the concept, a look at the expressions he correlates with the word is revealing. Israel is to demonstrate her love for God by holding fast (*dābaq*) to him (11:22; 30:20), listening to/obeying his voice (30:20),³⁵ fearing him (10:12), walking in his ways (10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16), and serving him (10:12; 11:13).

In Deuteronomy, Yahweh himself provides the model of covenant love. Because Yahweh loved Israel’s ancestors, he chose their descendants to be

³³ F. I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (JBLMS 14; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) 47.

³⁴ See the excellent presentation of this issue by Abraham Malamat, “You Shall Love Your Neighbor As Yourself: A Case of Misinterpretation?” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte*, Rolf Rendtorff Festschrift, E. Blum, C. Macholz and E. W. Stegemann, eds. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990) 111–15; cf. his more popular treatment in “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: What it Really Means,” *BAR* (July/August, 1990) 50–51. This study is carried further by Susan Ackerman, “The Personal is Political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love (*’āhēb*, *’āhābā*) in the Hebrew Bible,” *VT* 52 (2002) 437–58.

³⁵ The correlation of *šm*^c, “to hear, obey,” and *ahb*, “to love,” also occurs in Ugaritic. Cf. UT 67V:17–18, on which see Dahood, *Ras Shamra Parallels* 1.566.

his covenant partners (4:37; 10:15); because Yahweh loves Israel, he delivered them from the bondage of Egypt (7:8); because Yahweh loves Israel, he will bless them and cause their families, crops, and herds to multiply (7:13); because Yahweh loves the sojourner, he gives him food and clothing (10:18); because Yahweh loved Israel, he turned Balaam's curse into a blessing for them (23:5[6]). He had demonstrated his love for the ancestors by choosing their descendants and rescuing them from their slavery in Egypt (4:37). The word *'āhab* belongs to the covenantal semantic field, along with words like *hesed*, "steadfast love, loyalty," and *'āmûnâ*, "fidelity, faithfulness."

In verses 5–9 Moses calls on his people to answer the gracious love of Yahweh and to confirm their verbal commitment expressed in the Shema^c with unreserved and unqualified love for him. He begins in v. 5b by describing the intensity of the love for Yahweh that a covenant relationship with him demands: with all one's heart and with all one's soul and with all one's strength. Christian exegetes have tended to interpret these expressions as complementary attributes of the human personality, which together make up the inner person, and to marshal this text as evidence for a trichotomous biblical view of humanity, in contrast to a dichotomous view. Generally appealing to the Greek translations of the Hebrew expressions, proponents of the former argue that a human being consists essentially of mind/intellect (*dianoia/kardia*), a soul (*psychē*), and spiritual/moral power (*dynamis*). However, as S. D. McBride demonstrated thirty years ago,³⁶ this represents a fundamental misreading of the text. Verse 5 is not a Greek psychological statement, but an emphatic reinforcement of absolute singularity of devotion to Yahweh as called for by the Shema^c. The contrast between the psychological and literary interpretations of verse 5 is reflected in Figures 1 and 2.

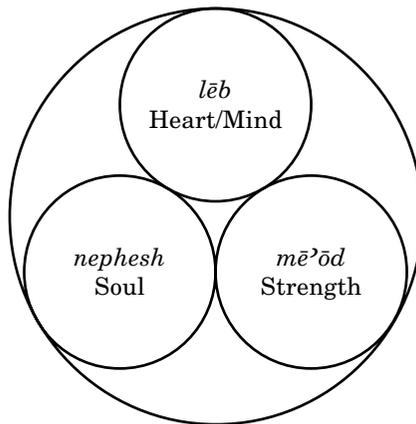


Figure 1: The Psychological Interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:5

³⁶ McBride, "The Yoke of the Kingdom: An Exposition of Deuteronomy 6:4–5," *Int* 27 (1973) 273–306.

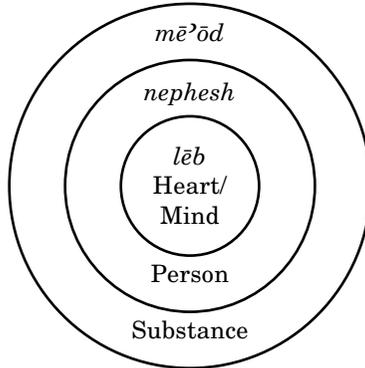


Figure 2: The Literary Interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:5

Each of the Hebrew expressions calls for brief comment. Literally, *lēb* denotes “heart,” but more often than not it is used metaphorically for either the seat of the emotions or the intellect or both. Biblical Hebrew has no separate word for “mind”; one’s *lēb* is both one’s “feeler” and “thinker.” In this context, we do not need to choose between the two, for both are in mind;³⁷ the word serves comprehensively for one’s inner being.

The basic meaning of *nephesh* is “breath,” though it can be used more concretely of the throat or neck (through which breath is inhaled; Jonah 2:5[6]; Ps 69:1[2]). However, the word is usually used in a series of derived metaphorical senses of appetite/desire (Prov 23:2; Eccl 6:7), life (Gen 9:5; 2 Sam 23:17),³⁸ and ultimately a person as a living being (Lev 21:11; Ezek 4; etc.), the whole self (Lev 26:11).³⁹ Here the word refers to one’s entire being.

The common rendering of the last expression, *mē'ōd*, as “strength” follows the Septuagint, which reads δυνάμις, “power” (rendered ἰσχύς in Mark 12:30), but again it flattens the nuanced reading of the Hebrew. This is one of only two places in the OT (cf. 2 Kgs 23:25) where the word is used as a noun; elsewhere it always functions adverbially, meaning “greatly, exceedingly.”⁴⁰

³⁷ This explains why, when Mark reports Jesus’ quotation of this verse in 12:30, he actually cites four Greek words: καρδία (= Hebrew *lēb*), ψυχή (= Hebrew *nephesh*), δύναντοι (= Hebrew *lēb*), and ἰσχύς (= Hebrew *mē'ōd*). Cf. Matt 22:27, which has only three elements, “heart, soul, and mind,” drops Hebrew *mē'ōd* and retains two words for *lēb*. Luke 10:27 flattens the sense of *lēb* by representing it only with καρδία, and retains ἰσχύς for the third element.

³⁸ Note especially Deut 12:23: “But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life (*nephesh*), and you must not eat the life (*nephesh*) with the meat (*bāšār*).” Note also the merismic use of *nephesh* and *bāšār* (“body and soul”) for totality in Isa 10:18. In Job 2:4–6, the adversary is permitted to touch Job’s *bāšār* but not his *nephesh*.

³⁹ How far removed the usage of *nephesh* may be from its basic meaning is indicated by Lev 21:11, where the word denotes a corpse, which by definition has no breath! On the usage of the word see further D. C. Fredericks, *NIDOTTE* 3.133–34.

⁴⁰ Cognate adjectival expressions occur in both Ugaritic (*mad/mid*, “great, strong, much”; *Kirta* 1.ii.35 [Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* 15]; *Baal Cycle* 10.v.15 [Ugaritic Narrative Poetry 130])

Although the Septuagint interprets the word in the sense of strength, it should be understood in the sense of economic or social strength, an interpretation confirmed by the Aramaic Targums, which render the word in terms of wealth (cf. Sir 7:30–31).⁴¹ In this context the reference is to all one possesses, that is, one's entire household.

The progression and concentricity in Moses' vocabulary now becomes apparent. Beginning with the inner being, he moves to the whole person, and then to all that one claims as one's own, as he calls on all Israelites to "love" God without reservation or qualification. All that one is and has is to submit to "the yoke of the kingdom."⁴² Covenant commitment must be rooted in the heart, but then extend to every level of one's being and existence.

In the remainder of this paragraph (vv. 6–9) Moses describes how this kind of unreserved commitment is to permeate all of life. In his presentation of the dimensions of covenant commitment Moses continues his centrifugal rhetorical pattern, beginning again on the inside and working his way out, the concentric circles of existence becoming ever larger.

First, the commitment expressed in the Shema^c and the attendant call for unreserved love for Yahweh must be indelibly written on one's heart/mind (v. 6), that is, be internalized, integrated, and incorporated in one's very being. This injunction reminds the reader that from the very beginning, Israelite faith and religion were to be internal matters of the heart, and not merely the possession of external symbols of covenant relationship or the performance of ritual acts.⁴³ Second, this covenant commitment was to be a family matter, demonstrated through the intentional indoctrination of the children and the spontaneous discussion of the issue with the members of one's household at every possible opportunity (v. 7).⁴⁴ Third, this covenant commitment was to be a public matter. Moses continues his pattern of triadic expression by charging his people to bind these words on their hands, apply them as phylacteries on their foreheads (literally between their eyes), and inscribe them on the doorposts of their buildings.

Verse 5 confirms that the fundamental issue in the Shema^c is exclusive and total devotion to Yahweh, a sense scarcely reflected in the traditional translation of the verse.

and Akkadian (*mādum*, "many, numerous," *ma'du*, quantity, fullness," from the verb *mādum*, "to become numerous [AHw, 573]). Cf. HALOT 2.538.

⁴¹ Cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* 232.

⁴² The serial use of three expressions may also be interpreted as a way of expressing the superlative degree. Just as "iniquity, rebellion, and sin" in Exod 34:7 refers to "every conceivable sin," so "heart, life, and property" refers to every part of a person.

⁴³ For later references to actual internalization of the will of God in the hearts of believers see Ps 37:31; 40:8, 119:11; Isa 51:7.

⁴⁴ To express the former, Moses employs a verb that occurs nowhere else in the OT: *šinnēn*, "to repeat, to inculcate by repetition." Traditionally the term has been viewed as deriving from a root *šānan*, "to whet, sharpen." Thus BDB 1042; but so also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* 332–33. However, in the light of the Ugaritic usage of the cognate *tnn*, "to repeat, to do twice," the word is better interpreted as a denominative of the numeral *šēni/šēnayim*, "two." Cf. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* 170, n. 17. The sense of the word is clarified by the parallel passage, 11:19, which uses *lim-mēd*, "to teach."

4. *The broader literary context of the Shema*⁴⁵. Throughout 6:4–8:20 Moses’ gaze is cast forward beyond the day when Israel will cross the Jordan to the time of occupation and settlement (6:10, 20; 7:1, 2; 8:10, 12). In this portion of the second address he repeatedly challenges his audience to keep alive the memory of Yahweh’s past actions. He will declare that the greatest threat to their relationship with Yahweh is not posed by the enemies who live in the land, but by their own hearts and minds, which are prone to forget the grace of God.

Verses 10–25 perform a double rhetorical and literary function. In the first instance these verses look back to 6:4–9, unpacking the foregoing by deepening, concretizing, and intensifying the statements made there. Karin Finsterbusch seems to be on the right track when she recognizes the thematic and structural links between these two parts.⁴⁵ The relationship between these two texts may be illustrated synoptically as in the Table below.

The Relationship Between Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and 6:10–25

6:4–9		6:10–25	
4a	“Hear, O Israel: Our God is Yahweh,	10	“And when Yahweh your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—
		11	with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill,
		12	and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—
		13	and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget Yahweh, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
		14	It is Yahweh your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve, and by his name you shall swear.”
4b	Yahweh alone!	14	“You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you, for Yahweh your God in your midst is an impassioned God,
		15	lest the anger of Yahweh your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.”
5	You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.	16	“You shall not put Yahweh your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.”

⁴⁵ Karin Finsterbusch, “Bezüge zwischen Aussagen von Dtn 6,4–9 und 6,10–25,” ZAW 114 (2002) 433–37.

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 6 | And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. | { | <p>17 “You shall diligently keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you.</p> <p>18 And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of Yahweh, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that Yahweh swore to give to your fathers by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as Yahweh has promised.”</p> |
| 7 | You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. | { | <p>20 “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that Yahweh our God has commanded you?’</p> <p>21 Then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.</p> <p>22 And Yahweh showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes.</p> <p>23 And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers.</p> <p>24 And Yahweh commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before Yahweh our God, as he has commanded us.’”</p> |
| 8 | You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. | | |
| 9 | You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” | | |

Of special significance for our study is the correlation between verse 4b and verses 14–15. To translate Finsterbusch,

The prohibition of the worship of the gods of the peoples surrounding Israel is the logical consequence of v. 4b β , as well as a concretization of this declaration. V. 15 advances v. 14 by warning of the specific effects of worshiping foreign gods (the annihilation of Israel by Yahweh). With this warning attention is drawn to the actual meaning of the declaration, “Yahweh alone.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ “Das Verbot, Götter der Völker in Israels Umgebung zu verehren, ist die logische Konsequenz von V. 4b und konkretisiert diese Aussage überdies. V. 15 führt V. 14 fort, wobei V. 15b warnend die Folge der Fremdgötter-verehrung (Vernichtung Israels durch Jhwh) nennt. Mit dieser Warnung wird auf die existentielle Bedeutung der Aussage ‘Jhwh ist einzig’ (V. 4b) aufmerksam gemacht” (ibid. 434).

Moses has actually begun his role as authoritative interpreter and expositor of the covenant. In the second instance, verses 10–25 look forward. Here Moses lays the groundwork for what follows in the next two chapters. His rhetorical strategy is evident in the structure of 6:4–8:20, which may be portrayed diagrammatically as follows:

Hear, O Israel! Our God is Yahweh! Yahweh alone! And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your being, and with all you possess.			
Structural Feature	6:10–25	7:1–26	8:1–20
Rhetorical Presentation of the Test	The Internal and External Tests of Love for Yahweh (10-19)	The External Test of Love for Yahweh (1-16)	The Internal Test of Love for Yahweh (1-16)
Audience Response	Question from Child: What is the meaning of these commandments? (20)	Question from Audience: How can I dispossess these nations? (17)	Conclusion by Audience: I have achieved this myself. (17)
Rhetorical Answer	Moses' Catechetical Answer (21–25)	Moses' Promise and Warning (18–26)	Moses' Reminder and Warning (18–20)

Moses' flow of thought in the respective sections is not always smooth or logical by modern definitions, and occasionally a modern reader may get bogged down with the repetition. But each section consists of three discreet parts: (1) Moses' announcement of the nature of the test of exclusive devotion; (2) Moses' introduction of a hypothetical interlocutor who responds verbally to the test; and (3) Moses' answer to the hypothetical interlocutor.

Moses' primary aim in this entire section is to explain to his people what he means by unreserved "love" for Yahweh. He does so by preparing the Israelites for a series of "tests" of their devotion that life in the promised land will present. The Israelites will pass the test if they demonstrate conformity to *das Hauptgebot* (to love Yahweh exclusively and totally) by obedience to his graciously revealed will.⁴⁷

In 6:10–19 Moses presents the heart of the matter. Verses 13–17 represent the center of gravity here as Moses unpacks what he had meant in the Shema^c: exclusive devotion to Yahweh demonstrated in the repudiation of all other gods and scrupulous adherence to his will. The motif of testing is highlighted in verse 16. In accordance with normal suzerainty treaty relationships, Moses forbids Israel the vassal from testing Yahweh the suzerain. But these verses are framed by advance notices of two kinds of tests of covenantal fidelity the divine Suzerain presents before his vassal in the promised land: the challenge of prosperity (vv. 10–12), and the challenge of the people they will face (6:18–19).⁴⁸ Adopting a rhetorical strategy I have else-

⁴⁷ This motif keeps resurfacing at critical junctures: 6:17–18; 7:11–12; 8:1, 6, 11.

⁴⁸ They had faced this test earlier and failed miserably (1:19–32).

where called “resumptive exposition,” in chapters 7 and 8 Moses will develop these two tests in detail, albeit in reverse order.

Although the character of Yahweh’s devotees is a concern in chapter 6 (cf. v. 5), the primary issue with respect to Yahweh in the broader context is neither his unitary character nor worship devoted to him in a single form/manifestation of the deity, the God of Israel. The question addressed here by Moses is not, “How many is Yahweh?” or “What is Yahweh like?” but “Whom will the Israelites worship?” It may have seemed legitimate in some circles to ask, “How many Yahwehs are there?” but we must distinguish between popular religion and official orthodox Yahwism.⁴⁹ In any case, this is not the question raised by Deuteronomy 6 or 6:4–8:26, or any other text in Deuteronomy, for that matter. The issue facing the Israelites who were about to cross the Jordan was not how many Yahwehs there were, nor which Yahweh they should serve (God is one!), nor even how many is Yahweh. The question that concerned Moses was whether they would remain exclusively devoted to Yahweh who had rescued them from Egypt and called them to covenant relationship with himself, or be seduced by and commit spiritual harlotry with the gods of the land of Canaan. The Israelites were not to bow down to gods of their own making (cf. 4:16–18) nor worship the astral deities (4:19), for Yahweh their God in their midst was a passionate God (6:15). In the face of the threat posed by other gods, the *Shema*^ϕ served as the obverse of the first principle of covenant relationship in the Decalogue, “You shall have no other gods beside/besides me.” As a declaration of Israel’s complete, undivided, unqualified, and undistracted devotion to Yahweh, “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone,” represents the required verbal response to the *Hauptgebot*. To Yahweh alone they shall cling; him alone shall they serve; and by his name alone they shall swear (Deut 6:13; 10:20).

2. *The scriptural afterlife of the Shema*^ϕ. Given the theological and confessional weight of the *Shema*^ϕ it is remarkable how faint are its echoes in the OT. And when it is finally sounded, it breaks out of the parochial and ethnocentric box of Moses’ original utterance with a supranational boom. After almost a thousand years of history in which the *Shema*^ϕ proved to be “more honored in the breach than in the observance,” after the horrors of

⁴⁹ The Kuntilet ‘Ajrud inscriptions represent exceptions that prove the rule, pointing precisely to the kind of syncretism in popular religion in ancient Israel against which Moses inveighs in Deuteronomy and that eventually led to the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem. Support for a polemic against competing or alternative Yahwehs here and elsewhere in the OT has been overestimated. References to Yahweh the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob all occur in Exodus, the narratives of which are emphatic about the identity of the God of the patriarchs and the God of the exodus (cf. 3:6, 14–16; 6:2–3). Exodus 32:1–6 provides no evidence for interpreting the golden calf as representing a different Yahweh than the Yahweh of the exodus. Aaron displays some consciousness of Yahweh (v. 5), but strictly interpreted, the Israelites requested the calf as a replacement for Moses, “who had brought us up from the land of Egypt” (v. 2). The same applies to Jeroboam’s calf cult, which he establishes as an alternative to the Yahweh cult in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:25–33). The interpretation of the Yahwehs of Teman and Paran as separate manifestations of Yahweh, analogous to Baal-Peor, etc., represents unwarranted literalism.

destruction and exile had signaled the suspension of the covenant blessings (586 BC), and after Yahweh had revisited his people only “in small measure,”⁵⁰ we hear the only certain OT echo in Zech 14:9, though here the enigmatic verbless clause is transformed into a verbal declaration:

Yahweh will be king over the whole earth.
On that day Yahweh will be [the only] one,
and his name the only name.⁵¹

The issue here is obviously not the unification of God in one deity, but expanding the boundaries of those who claim only Yahweh as their God to the ends of the earth. The ideal that Moses had hoped for Israel will be realized not only in Israel, but throughout the earth. The God of Israel will command the allegiance of all humanity, and he will be addressed by the only name he has revealed to his people.

Since NT writers tend to appeal to the Septuagint when they cite OT texts, we should not be surprised if Jesus’ quotation of the Shema^c in Mark 12:32–33 follows the Septuagintal reading. However, we should not make more of Jesus’ statement than the present context demands. When Jesus begins his identification of *das Hauptgebot* in Mark 12:29 with “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD” (which is the unambiguous meaning of the Greek), his debate with the scribe does not concern the nature of God or his unity/multiplicity. The issue is which commandment is the most important of all (v. 28). In citing the Shema^c Jesus is in perfect accord with Moses, the rest of the OT, and orthodox Jewish tradition. In fact, even though he absolutizes the statement beyond the immediate context of Deuteronomy 6 (where the Shema^c concerns the identity of the God of Israel), in Mark 12:32 the scribe who had asked the question of Jesus affirms and clarifies the linkage of the Shema^c with Deut 4:32,⁵² confirming our interpretation of *yhwh ’ehād* as a declaration of Yahweh’s exclusivity. After declaring, “You are right in saying that God is one,” he adds, “and there is none other besides him” (καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν αὐτοῦ).⁵³

⁵⁰ The post-exilic period did indeed represent fulfillment of Yahweh’s ancient promises to Israel, specifically the vision of the prophets as in Ezek 37:15–28, but only *mē’at*, “in small measure” (Ezek 11:16): (1) from Israel’s vast population only a few returned (ca. 40,000, cf. Ezra 2:64), and they represented primarily the tribe of Judah; (2) from the breadth of the Promised Land, only a small portion in and around Jerusalem was occupied; (3) in contrast to the glory of the Davidic/Solomonic Temple, only a small building served as the house of Yahweh (Hag 2:1–9), and even here the glory apparently never returned; (4) a Davidide (Zerubbabel) was indeed installed with political authority, but he was only a governor on behalf of the Persians; he was no King David.

⁵¹ Cf. NJPS, footnote, “I.e., the LORD alone shall be worshiped and shall be invoked by his true name.” The Hebrew reads, *baḡyôm hahû’ yihyeh yhwh ’ehād ûšēmō ’ehād*.

⁵² The Greek reads καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν αὐτοῦ, “and there is none other besides him.”

⁵³ This represents an adaptation of LXX’s reading of Deut 4:35, the only change being the replacement of ἔτι, “exception, what is left over,” with ἄλλος, “other.” A similar concern for the exclusivity of Yahweh, specifically as the object of worship is evident in Jesus’ response to Satan, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone” (μόνος, Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8). This statement is based on Deut 6:13 (though here προσκυνέω, “to prostrate oneself before, worship,” replaces LXX’s φοβέω, “to fear”), which clearly involves Yahweh’s claim to Israel’s exclusive devotion.

While Jesus cites the Shema^c as a sort of creedal statement linked with the great commandment, it falls to Paul to draw out its Christological significance. The apostle seems to allude to the Shema^c in Rom 3:29–34, where he announces that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews, since the one who justifies the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one and the same.⁵⁴ Here Paul draws the Gentiles into the covenant community of faith, asserting that in Christ this most-favored creedal statement of the Jews also applies to the Gentiles. In perfect accord with Moses, Paul's comment has less to do with the unity of God than with the universalization of his claim to be the God of all (in fulfillment of Zech 14:9).

However, Paul establishes the Christological significance of the Shema^c most pointedly in 1 Cor 8:1–6. His polemic against idolatry in this text is obviously rooted in Deut 6:4–5 and beyond.⁵⁵ The first hint of a connection surfaces in verse 3, where Paul, who has a lot to say about God's love for people, inserts a relatively rare reference to people loving God. On first sight, in verse 4 Paul appears to appeal to the Shema^c,⁵⁶ but a more direct antecedent for, "There is no God but one,"⁵⁷ had come at the end of Moses' first address, in Deut 4:35, 39, with his explicit declaration, "Yahweh, he is God, there is no other."⁵⁸ Firmly in the tradition of Moses, Paul hereby declares the uniqueness and exclusive existence of Yahweh in contrast to the nothingness of idols, which is a very deuteronomistic theme.

His comments in verses 5–6 reflect a thorough understanding of the Shema^c in its original context. For the sake of argument, he declares hypothetically that even if one concedes the existence of other gods (which, in the light of verse 4, he is obviously not actually willing to do), "but for us (ἀλλ' ἡμῖν) there is but one God (εἷς θεὸς), the Father, from whom all things came (cf. Deut 32:6, 18) and for whom we live (cf. Deut 14:1); and there is but one Lord (εἷς κύριος), Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." Translated into its original context on the plains of Moab, this is precisely the sort of thing that Moses could have said: "Even if one concedes the existence of other gods (which in the light of Deut 4:35, 39 he is obviously unwilling to do), but for us there is but one God, our Father (cf. Deut 1:31; 14:1; 32:6, 18), from whom all things came (cf. Gen 1:1–2:4a) and

⁵⁴ So also T. R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 205.

⁵⁵ For studies of Paul's reformulation of the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8 see J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1980) 179–83; N. T. Wright, "Monotheism, Christology and Ethics: 1 Corinthians 8," in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 120–36; L. Hurtado, *One God One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (London: SCM, 1988) 97–100.

⁵⁶ Thus Moberly, "Toward an Interpretation of the Shema," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard A. Childs* (ed. C. Seitz and K. Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 141.

⁵⁷ A stricter adherence to the Shema^c would have said, "There is no Lord (i.e. Yahweh) but one," referring to the God of Israel, rather than, "There is no God but one" (καὶ ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς).

⁵⁸ This impression is reinforced by Paul's reference in verse 5 to so-called gods, whether "in heaven or on earth," which seems to echo, "He is God in heaven above and on the earth below, there is no other," in Deut 4:39.

for whom we live (cf. Exod 19:5–6); his name is Yahweh, through whom all things came (Exod 20:11; 31:17), and through whom we live (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6).” What is remarkable in Paul, however, is his insertion of the name “Jesus Christ” after κύριος, which, on first sight, reflects Hebrew “Yahweh” of the Shema^c. However, in view of his reference to “many gods” and “many lords” in verse 5, here he appears to have in mind the title *’ădōnay* rather than the personal name Yahweh.⁵⁹ But the Christological effect is extraordinary. In the words of N. T. Wright,

Paul has placed Jesus *within* an explicit statement of the doctrine that Israel’s God is the one and only God, the creator of the world. The *Shema* was already, at this stage of Judaism, in widespread use as *the* Jewish daily prayer. Paul has redefined it christologically, producing what we can only call a sort of christological monotheism.⁶⁰

On the one hand, Yahweh, the one and only God to whom the Israelites declared allegiance is hereby identified unequivocally with Jesus. What the OT has said about Yahweh may now be said about the Christ. On the other hand, in and through Jesus Christ one encounters the one and only God.⁶¹ Inasmuch as Paul is writing to the Corinthians, representatives of the kingdoms of the earth, in the conversion of the Gentiles one witnesses the beginning of the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy as well.

III. CONCLUSION

The Shema^c should not be taken out of context and interpreted as a great monotheistic confession. Moses had made that point in 4:35, 39: “For Yahweh (alone) is God; there is none beside(s) him.” Nor is the issue in the broader context the nature of God in general or his integrity in particular—though the nature and integrity of his people is a very important concern. This is a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment in response to the question, “Who is the God of Israel?” The language of the Shema^c is “sloganesque” rather than prosaic: “Yahweh our God! Yahweh alone!” or “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!” This was to be the distinguishing mark of the Israelite people; they are those (and only those) who claim Yahweh alone as their God.

This interpretation of the Shema^c raises the question of how it should be rendered in translation. In his 1990 article, R. W. L. Moberly argued for the translation, “Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one.”⁶² But in his 1999 interpretation of the Shema^c he declares, “What ‘YHWH is one’ means must be something that makes appropriate the total and unreserved response of ‘love’ that is immediately specified [in v. 5].” He goes on to write, “To say that YHWH is ‘one’ is not to say something about God that is separable from its

⁵⁹ Cf. Deut 10:17, where Yahweh is referred to as “God of gods and Lord of lords” (*’ădōnē hā’ădōnīm*). The latter title is explicitly applied to the Lamb in Rev 17:14.

⁶⁰ N. T. Wright, “Monotheism, Christology and Ethics: 1 Corinthians 8” 129.

⁶¹ Similarly Moberly, “Toward an Interpretation of the Shema” 142.

⁶² “Yahweh is One: The Translation of the Shema” 209–15.

human counterpart of 'love,' but rather designates Yahweh as the appropriate recipient of unreserved 'love.'⁶³ The way theologians use this verse demonstrates that this is precisely what is *not* communicated when *yhw̄h 'eḥād* is translated "YHWH is one." While this may represent a literally formal translation of the words of the Shema^c, it actually misleads the reader. The statements in Scripture should be translated according to their meaning in context, not according to dictionary definitions of the words.

Our interpretation of the Shema^c is confirmed by verses 5–8, in which Moses declares that within the context of covenant relationship, Israel's love for Yahweh is to be absolute, total, internal, communal, public, and transmitted from generation to generation. "Yahweh our God! Yahweh alone": these are the words to be imprinted on the heart, to be worn on one's hands and forehead, and to be inscribed above the doors and gates—that all the world may know that in this place Yahweh alone is served. This is what makes an Israelite a true Israelite. Whether they are descended from Abraham or not, the true covenant community consists of all and only those who make this their cry of allegiance, and who demonstrate this commitment with uncompromising covenant love.

⁶³ "Toward an Interpretation of the Shema" 132, 133.