

The Existence and Nature of God

by Michael Rudolph

Delivered to Ohev Yisrael October 11, 2008

We read in Hebrews 5:12-14:

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

This speaks to all of us who are several years in the faith, and it says that by this time we should already be teachers of others – not ourselves need teaching in the foundations of Scripture and of biblical life. Yet, Paul – I believe it was Paul – was talking to Jewish followers of Yeshua who, like many of us today, needed to re-learn the Bible’s foundational principles, or perhaps even learn them for the first time. What are these principles? Hebrews 6:1-3 gives us these examples:

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Messiah, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation (1) of repentance from dead works and (2) of faith toward God, (3) of the doctrine of baptisms, (4) of laying on of hands, (5) of resurrection of the dead, and (6) of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”

These six elementary principles are very broad and encompass many others in the same way as the first commandment to love God and the second commandment to love our neighbor, encompasses all the other commandments and the prophets. The elders have discussed this and agree that, for the sake of new believers in our midst, and old believers who either forgot the first principles or didn’t learn them adequately the first time around, we should periodically re-teach them to the entire congregation, so that more of us can move on from the milk to the meat.

So the plan is this: Ohev will devote the next four to six months teaching and reviewing the foundations of Messianic Jewish faith. Each *Shabbat*, a different foundation will be taught from the *bima* and then, to reinforce the teaching, I will ask all *chavurah* leaders to set some of their meeting time aside that same week, in order to discuss the subject matter that was taught the previous *Shabbat*.

Now the time-honored way of establishing a curriculum for Messianic Jewish fundamentals would be to appoint a committee, answerable to the elders, that would come up with a draft curriculum, that would then be discussed and amended by the elders, who would then send it back to the committee, that would again discuss it, and so on. After a few such back and forths, a final curriculum would be approved by the elders, probably no sooner than next March.

Well, I don’t want to wait until next March to start, and I don’t think we have to. I have a pretty good idea of what fundamentals ought to be taught, and some of you do too. So I am going to begin today by teaching on the nature of God, and I will ask all of you to send the elders topics that you think should be included in the program. So let’s begin.

When we call ourselves “believers” in the context of Judaism broadly, we mean we believe in the God of the *Tanach*. Regrettably, it is not assumed that today’s Jews all believe in God, and in fact, there are new Jewish denominations (e.g. Humanistic Judaism”) in which a majority of their members do not. Doctrinally and historically, Orthodox Jews believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who created the world and everything in it, and who is viewed as an indivisible unity, and whose identity is separate from that of the expected Messiah. In contrast, Messianic Jews believe God to be a mysterious tri-unity *echad*, that is, the Father who reigns from heaven, the Father’s son who received the name Yeshua when he was born on earth to be our Mashiach (i.e. Messiah), and the *Ruach Kodesh* (the Holy Spirit counselor and provider of power) whom Yeshua sent to live within us after His resurrection and ascension into Heaven.

John 14:16-19: *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.”*

John 14:25-26: *“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”*

John 15:26: *“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”*

John 16:7-10: *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more;”*

Acts 1:8-9 *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”*

Christians refer to this mysterious triune God as the “Trinity,” and describe it as “the three persons of God in one.” That unfortunate expression “three persons” is responsible for Jews who view God as *yachid* – an absolute unity – leveling the accusation against Messianic Jews that we are idolaters because we worship three gods and, worse than that, that we worship a man whom we call “God.” To summarize, it is fair to say, as a comparison and generalization, that Rabbinical Jews worship God whom they consider an absolute unity, while Messianic Jews worship God whom we consider a tri-unity. And while the Rabbinical Jewish world is awaiting the first coming of Messiah whom they are sure will be a natural man, Messianic Jews, understand Yeshua to be the fullness of the deity; as Colossians 2:9 says:

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;”

But is Yeshua actually God? John 1:1 says “yes,” and that He took a major part in the creation:

John 1:1-3: *“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 were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. “*

And the Scripture goes on to say:

John 1:4-13: *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

Finally, if there is any doubt that the “Word” referred to is none other than Yeshua, John 1:14 makes it clear:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Still, Yeshua is not God in the sense that he is all of God, since when Yeshua came to the earth, God the Father remained in heaven and in control of all things.

I would now like to back up a little. In all that has been said thus far, we have assumed that God exists, and we have said little regarding why we think so. Well, Psalms 14:1 says in part :

“Only a fool says in his heart ‘There is no God.’”

It sounds pretty persuasive, but it is only so if you believe that the Scriptures are true, and a large part of the world doesn’t. So in proving the existence of God, we have a chicken and egg situation. God provided the Scriptures so that we can know more about Him, but we will not believe what Scripture says unless we already believe in Him. There was a time when I did not believe in Him, nor did I believe in the Scriptures. So what’s the answer? The answer is that at some point, each of us must experience a communication from God that we believe. In regard to this, Romans 1:19-20 assures us that if we have innocent eyes, we will be assured that God exists through merely observing His creation; it says:

“What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and

divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

So why didn't I see it for so many years? Romans 1:21-22 has the answer; it says:

“For although they knew God [meaning that there was a time when, in our innocence we all knew God] they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ...”

That was me alright, and if God hadn't come looking for me and exercised His power to reveal Himself, I would still be in that condition. Well, maybe that's more disconcerting than encouraging. Suppose God doesn't reveal Himself to someone. Would it be fair then for me to know Him and that other person not? I cannot judge God's fairness, and the Scripture we have just read from Romans states that “men are without excuse.” And in his book “Growing to Maturity,” in chapter 1, our *Tikkun shaliach* Dan Juster puts it this way:

“In conclusion, we see the Bible teaches human beings are responsible before God because they are capable of knowing He exists and they stand under His Judgment.”

So the answer must be that if we want someone we know to be saved, we need to pray for that person a lot more than trying to persuade him with logic. And Dan said something else in chapter 1 that struck me; he said:

“As you read Exodus 20 to 23 and Leviticus 19 you notice God often added these words to His most important moral and social instructions: ‘I am the Lord.’ God's very character stands behind His Law and He will punish those who transgress it.”

The first and foremost commandment is “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.*” That was commanded to Israel before Yeshua's incarnation, and before the *Ruach* was poured out on all who would receive Him, so it must be possible.

To learn more about the things I have discussed, I recommend you read “Growing to Maturity,” section A of chapter 2 – “The Existence and Nature of God.”