

July 2009

Frank W. Nelte

## **DEUTERONOMY 6:4 AND MARK 12:29 EXPLAINED**

About 15 years ago I wrote a short article about Deuteronomy 6:4, because this verse was being used by some people to present a very distorted picture of God. That article was written from the perspective of dealing with an onslaught on the doctrines of God's Church. This present article is a complete revision and expansion of that 15-year old article with much additional information.

Of interest is how Deuteronomy 6:4 has been understood by the Jews in various ages. We might think that the Jews have always interpreted this verse in the same way, but that is not the case. We'll see that over the centuries the Jews have changed the explanation for this verse, to meet changing demands within the Jewish community.

In this article we'll first examine the translation of Deuteronomy 6:4, which will comprise the greatest part of this article. Only after we have completed a thorough investigation of this specific verse will we then examine the translation of Mark 12:29, which verse represents a New Testament quotation of Deuteronomy 6:4. The correct translation of Deuteronomy 6:4 does not really depend on how Mark 12:29 is translated. Rather, the correct translation of Mark 12:29 depends on the correct translation of Deuteronomy 6:4.

So let's start with Deuteronomy 6:4. In the KJV this verse reads as follows:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD:" (Deuteronomy 6:4)

The six Hebrew words in this verse are:

"Shema Israel YHVH Eloheinu YHVH echad."

"Shema" is the qal imperative of the verb "shama", and "Eloheinu" is the noun "Elohim" with the suffix "nu" which means "our".

In this article we'll look at the following things:

- 1) The effects of punctuation.
- 2) The context in which Deuteronomy 6:4 appears.
- 3) How this verse and its context appears in the New Testament.
- 4) How the Jews have historically viewed this verse.
- 5) The key Hebrew words that are used in this verse.
- 6) A correct translation for Deuteronomy 6:4.
- 7) A correct translation for Mark 12:29.

## **THE EFFECTS OF PUNCTUATION**

Originally the Old Testament Hebrew text (the same is true for the New Testament Greek text) did not contain any punctuation. This made it very difficult to read any text with which the reader was not already familiar. Once a reader is familiar with a given text, then the lack of punctuation no longer presents the same difficulties. Punctuation has the ability to greatly enhance the clarity of any written text.

However, wrong punctuation can grossly distort the meaning of a written text. In effect, wrong, inappropriate punctuation is just as bad and misleading as is a mistranslation. Wrong punctuation is actually a form of mistranslation. The wrong punctuation shows that the translator did not really understand the intended meaning of the text he was translating.

Coming to Deuteronomy 6:4, the Hebrew text contains exactly six words, only one of which is a verb. The one verb in this sequence should tell us that these six words form only ONE expression with ONE subject. The absence of a second verb in this sequence means that there cannot be two distinct subjects in this sentence.

But in the English KJV this verse is divided into TWO distinct expressions, each with its own focus. It follows that the KJV translators were therefore FORCED to provide a second verb, a verb that is neither present nor yet implied in the Hebrew text. The KJV translators achieved this division into two distinct expressions by the use of punctuation.

The translators provided a colon after the word "Israel" to achieve this division. The colon limits THE APPLICATION of the verb in this expression (which happens to be the first word) to one single word, the word "Israel". That is a mistake! The one verb in this six-word sequence really applies to ALL FIVE words that follow this verb in the Hebrew text. All six words really form one expression with one single focus.

We'll examine this specific matter more closely in a later section of this article. For now we should recognize that the punctuation provided by the translators (i.e. the colon) has unjustifiably divided this six-word sequence in the Hebrew text (ten words in the English KJV text) into two distinct expressions: the first distinct thought being "hear, O Israel", and the second distinct thought being "the LORD our God is one LORD". To make this division work, the translators provided the verb "is" for this second thought, even though the verb "is" is not at all implied in the Hebrew text.

Let's now look at the context in which this verse appears.

### **THE CONTEXT OF DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

The context for this verse really begins in Deuteronomy 4:1.

In fact, apart from Deuteronomy 4:1 starting with an adverb meaning "now" (i.e. Hebrew "attah"), Deuteronomy 4:1 starts with the same words as Deuteronomy 6:4. Both these verses start with "shema Israel" (though the inclusion of the adverb "attah" in 4:1 there resulted in a reversal of these two words, to read "Israel shema"). In both places the verb "shama" is used in the qal imperative, making both statements commands. (We'll compare these two verses more closely in a later section.) "Hearken" in 4:1 and "hear" in 6:4 are both translations of the imperative form of the Hebrew verb "shama".

Deuteronomy chapter 4 then discusses some of the statutes and judgments. Then, in Deuteronomy 5:1, Moses called all Israel together and said "hear O Israel the statutes and judgments", so that Israel would learn to obey God. God's statutes and judgments are still the focus of attention. In verse 4 Moses stated that God Himself had spoken to Israel at Mount Sinai. Then Moses proceeded to again state the ten

commandments.

At the end of the ten commandments Moses then said in verse 22 that God had spoken "THESE WORDS" to the entire nation. The rest of chapter 5 focuses on the importance of obedience to God. In verse 29 God lamented the fact that Israel didn't really have the heart and the commitment to faithfully "keep all my commandments always". God then told Moses in verse 31: "I will speak unto you all the commandments and statutes and judgments which you shall teach them".

In Deuteronomy 6:1 Moses then fulfilled God's instruction from verse 31, by stating: "now these are the commandments, the statutes and the judgments".

Notice that verse 3 in chapter 6 uses the statement "hear therefore O Israel", and verse 4 then repeats the expression "hear O Israel". This expression in verse 3 is only the first part of the expression "hear (therefore) O Israel AND OBSERVE TO DO IT". The focus of verse 3 is still quite clearly on obedience to God, as was also already the case in Deuteronomy 4:1.

As already stated, in verse 4 the Hebrew verb for "hear" is used in the imperative mood, which makes verse 4 a command. And so even without the additional verb for "observe", verse 4 basically makes the same opening statement as does verse 3; i.e. verse 4 also conveys the thought "hear O Israel AND OBSERVE TO DO IT". Or, more accurately, verse 4 should be stated as "OBEY O Israel", or as "hearken O Israel".

Deuteronomy 6:5 then presents a summary statement for all the commandments and statutes and judgments that have been covered. ALL OF THEM are collectively covered by the injunction "you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart ...". Note! The statement "you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart ..." is intended to show HOW the people were to obey God's commandments and statutes and judgments; i.e. with whole-hearted commitment and with undivided loyalty.

Then Deuteronomy 6:6 reads: "and THESE WORDS which I COMMAND you this day shall be in your heart". This is a concluding statement! Here the expression "these words" refers to everything that has been stated from Deuteronomy 4:1 to 6:5. Again, this statement makes clear that the preceding verses (i.e. Deuteronomy 6:4-5) state a COMMAND! They are not an ontological statement about God's characteristics or attributes; they are a command regarding WHO TO OBEY (verse 4) AND HOW TO OBEY (verse 5)!

Verse 6 concludes the discussion regarding God's commandments and statutes and judgments. From verse 7 onwards the focus is on teaching these things to successive generations.

So the entire context of Deuteronomy 6:4 is one of obedience to God. Now let's take a look at this verse and its context in the New Testament.

### **GOSPEL QUOTATIONS OF THE CONTEXT OF DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

While in the New Testament Deuteronomy 6:4 is only quoted in Mark 12:29, verse 5 is quoted in all three synoptic gospels. There are significant differences in these three accounts which make clear that one account refers to one specific occasion, while the other two accounts refer to a different occasion. We'll examine all three accounts, as they give us some insight concerning how these verses were being understood by the Jews at the time of Christ's ministry.

Let's start with Luke's account which only quotes verse 5.

### **LUKE 10:25-28**

Luke 10:25 shows a certain lawyer (i.e. one of the scribes) trying to trick Jesus Christ with the question: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?". In a different situation in Matthew 19:17 Jesus Christ answered this identical question with the statement: "if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments". But here Christ was dealing with a scholar of the Old Testament, one who represented the religious understanding of the sect of the Pharisees, and one who wanted to trick Him. And here Jesus Christ did NOT provide the answer to the man's trick question.

Instead, Jesus Christ asked this scholar to answer his own question. [COMMENT: This is often the most effective way to deal with questions, where we know that the one asking the questions is already fully aware of the correct answers.] Christ asked: "what is written in the law? How do YOU read it?" (Verse 26). The man promptly responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 TOGETHER WITH the last part of Leviticus 19:18 (verse 27).

Now the Old Testament itself does not claim any special status for Deuteronomy 6:5 or for Leviticus 19:18. At that time the Old Testament had not yet been divided into verses, and these two statements are buried deep within the text of the Old Testament. This answer indicates that this was a subject with which the scribes were already very familiar. It was the scribe himself who linked these two statements from two different books together. This is not something Jesus Christ had done for him. Rather, Jesus Christ simply confirmed that the man's answer was correct.

Luke presents this incident simply as an introduction for the parable about the good Samaritan. That parable need not concern us in this discussion. However, we should note that the Jewish religious leaders of that time had figured out for themselves that ALL OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS AND LAWS AND JUDGMENTS can be effectively summarized by these two statements from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. That is what the scribe's answer to Jesus Christ's question tells us.

The point is that this answer represented THE COMMON UNDERSTANDING of the Pharisees at that time, though the people in general didn't necessarily understand this. But the scribes and Pharisees placed considerable focus on this subject.

We should also notice one other point. When the lawyer was asked how HE read the law, the lawyer started his quotation with verse 5 of Deuteronomy 6. Specifically, this lawyer did NOT include verse 4 in presenting his point. Amongst the Jews TODAY Deuteronomy 6:4 is far more important than verse 5. But at the time of Christ's ministry the Jews still considered Deuteronomy 6:5 to be more important than verse 4. That is what this scribe's answer reveals. The scribe was quite content to leave out the preamble of verse 4, and here Jesus Christ Himself raised no objections to Deuteronomy 6:4 being omitted from the lawyer's answer.

We should note that the scribes and Pharisees themselves placed great importance on Deuteronomy 6:5, and in this regard Jesus Christ agreed with them. Christ not only accepted this lawyer's answer; Jesus Christ even endorsed this answer.

Keep this point in mind (that the Pharisees themselves could already effectively summarize what God wants from us) as we examine the other two accounts. Now let's look at where these verses are quoted in Mark's Gospel.

### **MARK 12:28-34**

These verses in Mark's Gospel refer to a different occasion. The scribe who was involved in this event had a completely different attitude from the scribe in the account we examined in Luke's Gospel. However, with two different scribes on two different occasions bringing up basically the same subject, this illustrates that this was a popular subject amongst the scribes and the Pharisees.

After Jesus Christ had silenced the arguments of the Sadducees, one particular scribe acknowledged that Christ had presented an irrefutable argument against the position of the Sadducees. This scribe was familiar with the reasoning of linking Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18 as the most effective summary of all of God's requirements for man. Apparently this scribe wanted to know very sincerely what position Jesus Christ endorsed, regarding what is the first commandment of all; and so he asked his question (verse 28). It seems clear that Jesus Christ perceived this scribe's sincere attitude, and so answered accordingly.

At no stage in Mark's account is there any hint of animosity or trickery on the part of this scribe. Rather, this scribe then showed admiration and respect for Christ's answer, by further endorsing Christ's answer. Likewise Jesus Christ, in seeing the scribe's sincerity, extended a hand of friendship to the scribe, by saying to him: "you are not far from the kingdom of God".

Note! Jesus Christ did NOT say "you are not far from the kingdom of God" because the scribe had said "there is one God and there is none other but He". Not at all! Christ made this statement because the scribe discerned that THE ENTIRE SACRIFICIAL AND RITUALISTIC SYSTEM is of far less importance than love towards God and towards neighbor. For an Israelite to see the sacrificial system in its correct perspective was a very profound thing. That is what people like Samuel and David and Hosea had also understood (e.g. 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Psalm 51:16; Hosea 6:6; etc.). And this scribe had the same understanding.

This scribe's attitude was completely different from the attitude we can see in Luke 10.

When the scribe asked "which is the first commandment of all?" (Verse 28), Jesus Christ first quoted Deuteronomy 6:4, then verse 5, and then Leviticus 19:18. Jesus Christ concluded His answer by saying: "there is none other commandment greater than these" (verse 31).

There are a number of things we should note in this account.

For a start, in this instance Jesus Christ made a point of specifically starting the quotation with verse 4. It was very likely the scribe's sincere attitude that prompted Jesus Christ to start His answer by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, rather than just quoting verse 5 for "the first commandment". Starting with verse 4 achieved a twofold purpose. First of all, it told the scribe TO WHOM Israel was commanded to listen. Jesus Christ was "the LORD" of the Old Testament. And this statement really says in plain words: hearken to and obey Jesus Christ, the Lord! The scribe obviously did not grasp this at all.

Secondly, this Scripture hints that there are at least TWO God Beings! This the scribe likewise didn't grasp at all! The Pharisees didn't understand that the Old Testament already reveals two distinct God Beings within the God Family.

This hint may be more difficult to see. But the hint is as follows: The first verse in the Bible already speaks about "Elohim", the plural of the word "Eloah", thus implying more than one. Genesis 1:26 then further implies the existence of MORE THAN ONE BEING, when Elohim said "let US make man in OUR image after OUR likeness". In the ten commandments God said "I am YHVH YOUR ELOHIM" in Exodus 20:2, and He followed this with the statement "you shall have NO OTHER ELOHIM before Me" in verse 3, implying that theoretically there could be other "elohim". These statements from Exodus 20:2-3 are repeated in Deuteronomy 5:6-7 in the lead-up to Deuteronomy 6.

Thus when Deuteronomy 6:4 then speaks about "YHVH OUR ELOHIM", the pronoun "our" again hints at the existence of another "Elohim" of whose existence Israel was not aware. Here the pronoun "OUR", just like the pronoun "YOUR" in "your God" (Exodus 20:2), is used to identify one specific Elohim. I would not have been able to identify this hint, if it were not for the fact that Jesus Christ followed quoting this

verse with the quotation of Psalm 110:1, something we'll shortly examine more closely.

Anyway, as mentioned at the start, after we have looked at a correct translation for Deuteronomy 6:4, we'll look closely at the translation of Mark 12:29. But for the moment let's just examine the English translation presented in Mark 12:29 at face value, because there is something that becomes evident even from the flawed KJV translation. The statement says: the Lord our God is one LORD! It does NOT say: the Lord our God is one GOD! There is a big difference in these two statements!

The Pharisees assumed that "God" and "Lord" were simply synonyms for the same Being! But that is not correct! This flawed understanding becomes apparent from the scribe's answer.

JESUS CHRIST had quoted "the Lord (kurios) our God (theos) is one LORD (kurios)". THE SCRIBE interpreted this to mean "there is one GOD (theos), and there is none other but He". But that is not what Jesus Christ had said! The scribe obviously didn't see any distinction between "Lord" and "God". The point to note is that neither Deuteronomy 6:4 nor this quotation in Mark 12:29 says "there is one GOD". That statement ("there is one God") is only AN INCORRECT CONCLUSION DRAWN BY THE SCRIBE!

To use the Greek words in this account, Mark 12:29 says there is one "KURIOS", but it does NOT say there is one "THEOS". At this point in time TWO Beings qualify for the designation "theos" (i.e. God the Father and Jesus Christ). But only ONE "kurios" (i.e. Jesus Christ) has thus far ever dealt with any human beings. It is not a matter of the title "kurios" somehow not applying to God the Father; it is simply a case of "you have neither heard His voice AT ANY TIME, nor seen His shape" (John 5:37), and THEREFORE thus far God the Father has never been a "kurios" to mankind.

"The Lord our God is one Lord" is in fact a wrong translation! However, even this wrong translation does not say that there is "one God". That is the point to notice at this time. Later we'll discuss this verse more fully.

Here, and also in Matthew's account of this incident, we'll see that Jesus Christ then FOLLOWED UP this statement with the proof for "two Gods" in the Old Testament. We'll look at that in a moment. But first let's finish our examination of this part of Mark's account.

When Jesus Christ said to this scribe "you are not far from the kingdom of God" (verse 34), Christ was NOT saying "you've got it all correct"! No, Jesus Christ was simply saying "you're on the right track". Christ made this statement because this scribe correctly understood how all the sacrifices and rituals fit into the greater picture.

It is encouraging to be told that we are on the right track, and Christ was encouraging this scribe for his honest attitude. But being on the right track is not the same as having a perfectly correct understanding. The scribe was honest (otherwise Jesus Christ would NEVER have given the man this answer!), but there were still major gaps in the man's understanding. This is the most positive statement by Jesus Christ to any scribe or Pharisee. As far as it went, this scribe's attitude appears to have been fine.

Now let's examine Matthew's account.

#### **MATTHEW 22:35-40**

This is the same context as Mark 12, but Matthew does not quote verse 4 of Deuteronomy 6; Matthew starts the quotation with verse 5. The setting is as follows: the Sadducees had been silenced, and then a lawyer (i.e. a scribe) came and asked a question.

Matthew 22:35 states: "Then one of them, *which* was a lawyer, asked *him* a question, TEMPTING him,

and saying".

Matthew does not present the man's response to Christ's answer. Mark 12:34 tells us that this scribe answered "discreetly". Quite possibly it was so "discreet" that some of the disciples, including Matthew, didn't hear it, or even hear Jesus Christ's equally discreet short reply (i.e. "you are not far from the kingdom of God"). We can think of other occasions when some of them also didn't hear everything correctly. At any rate, Matthew's account omits these details.

The point is, had Matthew been aware of this scribe's discreet answer and Jesus Christ's equally discreet reply, Matthew would very likely not have used the evaluative statement "tempting Him". This verb "tempting" gives us Matthew's own assessment of the situation, and had Matthew been familiar with Jesus Christ's statement "you are not far from the kingdom of God" to this particular man, Matthew would have understood that THIS PARTICULAR SCRIBE was asking a sincere question. Yes, the scribe already knew the answer to his own question, but he wanted to know whether Jesus Christ agreed with this answer or not. And his response to Christ's answer was one of admiration. Matthew and Mark clearly speak about the same incident. Thus I believe that we must view the expressions "tempting Him" and "you are not far from the kingdom of God" as mutually exclusive: they cannot both be correct. So I suspect that here Matthew's use of the expression "tempting Him" is inappropriate.

Next, notice that Matthew LEAVES OUT the quotation from Deuteronomy 6:4! Matthew just presents the two great commandments, leaving out the preamble from Deut. 6:4. This should tell us two things: First of all, at that point in time Deuteronomy 6:4 did not yet enjoy the prominence it later achieved amongst the Jews. Jesus Christ in fact DID start his reply with Deut. 6:4, but that didn't make an impression on Matthew, because amongst religious Jews this verse had not yet attained any special significance. And Matthew did not record it in his account.

Secondly, it should tell us that at this event Jesus Christ presented Deuteronomy 6:4 SPECIFICALLY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THIS ONE SCRIBE! It was a test of that man's understanding, not of his attitude. Christ had already discerned the scribe's good attitude, and with this preamble He was testing the man's level of understanding. Keep in mind that Deuteronomy 6:4 is TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY a statement about Jesus Christ! Christ was in fact saying to this scribe: do you understand WHO is really the God of the Old Testament? The scribe's answer in Mark 12:32 shows that in this regard his understanding still fell a long way short.

Matthew simply records Christ's answer as consisting of quotations from Deuteronomy 6:5 and from Leviticus 19:18.

Now let's consider the follow-on to this discussion with this particular scribe. This is recorded by both Matthew and Mark.

Matthew 22:41-46 is a direct response to Christ's opening statement about Deuteronomy 6:4 (which statement Matthew has not recorded!). The parallel verses in Mark are Mark 12:35-37. Note! These verses (i.e. Matt 22:41-46 and Mark 12:35-37) are a direct expansion of Christ's statement in Mark 12:29; they do not apply to "the two great commandments"; they apply specifically to the "hear O Israel" statement. Let's look at Matthew's record.

Matthew 22:41 says: "while the Pharisees were gathered together JESUS ASKED THEM". Undoubtedly this group of Pharisees included the scribe who had just answered so discreetly. Mark's version of this is somewhat condensed, and has Jesus Christ asking: "how say THE SCRIBES that Christ is the son of David?" Matthew records Christ's initial question as being more neutral, asking: "what think you of Christ, whose son is He?" When THEY provide the answer, then Christ asks: "how then does David in spirit call Him Lord?", and Christ then quoted Psalm 110:1.

It is Jesus Christ's reference to Psalm 110:1 that reveals that Deuteronomy 6:4 is intended to also show us something we might not immediately think of if we only consider Deuteronomy 6:4 on its own.

Note! Jesus Christ's question appeals to hierarchy! Christ's question is: WHY would a father ever address his son as "lord"? The premise of Christ's point is that NORMALLY it would be the son who addresses his father as "lord", and not the other way around. Normally a father has authority over his son. Thus Christ was showing that there is MORE to the Messiah than simply being "a son of David". Christ's question really requires the answer: the Messiah is also the Son OF GOD! And that is why David called Him "Lord".

THE PURPOSE of Jesus Christ's question was to point out that DAVID already understood that there are TWO Gods in the God Family, who also happen to be in a hierarchal relationship. Jesus Christ was not saying that the answer the scribes had given (Matthew 22:42) was wrong, because that answer was correct, albeit incomplete. What Jesus Christ was saying is that the scribes had not drawn the right conclusions from Psalm 110:1. They should have understood from Psalm 110:1 that the Messiah must ALSO at the same time be the Son of God. Psalm 110:1 should have helped them to understand that ALREADY, IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES, there were two distinct individuals in the God Family. And with a correct understanding of Psalm 110:1 people could also have come to a clearer understanding of Deuteronomy 6:4.

Let's look at Psalm 110:1, because this is important to understand.

### **PSALM 110:1**

This verse reads as follows:

"The LORD (YHVH) said unto my Lord (Adonai), Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

In this verse God the Father is referred to as "YHVH" and Jesus Christ is referred to as "Adonai". This verse speaks about A RELATIONSHIP between God the Father and Jesus Christ. This YHVH-Adonai relationship predates their Father-Son relationship. This statement also makes clear that the YHVH-Adonai relationship is hierarchal. The One who says: "sit You at My right hand" is clearly in a higher position of authority than the other God. Jesus Christ also clearly endorsed this hierarchal relationship when He stated: "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). That is a hierarchy.

So here is what we need to understand.

1) In the relationship BETWEEN GOD AND MAN it is JESUS CHRIST who is "YHVH". Christ is "YOUR God" in Exodus 20:2 and "OUR God" in Deuteronomy 6:4.

2) But in the relationship BETWEEN GOD THE FATHER AND JESUS CHRIST it is GOD THE FATHER who is "YHVH". In any relationship which involves God the designation "YHVH" is reserved for the One who is in supreme authority in that specific relationship.

3) Specifically, IN THE RELATIONSHIP between God and man, in the Old Testament God the Father had not been "YHVH", because, apart from deciding which specific human beings to call in this age, God the Father had delegated all dealings with mankind to Jesus Christ. This delegation of responsibility basically continues right up until the time when Jesus Christ will "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24).



The key for establishing the identity of "YHVH" in any passage in the Old Testament is to establish THE RELATIONSHIP that is being addressed in that passage, keeping in mind that in the presence of the Father the Son is not called "YHVH". Thus in the very few places where "YHVH" is shown in a relationship with another "God", it is God the Father who is "YHVH". In all the other passages it is Jesus Christ who is "YHVH".

[COMMENT: Another place where "YHVH" is used for God the Father is Isaiah 53:6. That verse also shows the two God Beings in a relationship to one another. The context speaks about Jesus Christ giving His life for our sins. When it says that "YHVH has laid on Him the iniquity of us all", it means that God the Father has laid our iniquity upon Jesus Christ. This verse also shows two Gods in a relationship to one another. However, such references to God the Father as "YHVH" are extremely rare amongst the 6519 times the name "YHVH" is used in the Old Testament.]

The name "YHVH" is an expression of power and might and glory. The word "YHVH" is not a name like the human name "John Smith", which pinpoints one specific man. In any context where two Beings could theoretically qualify for the name "YHVH" (i.e. God the Father and Jesus Christ) it is always THE GREATER (i.e. God the Father) who will be identified as "YHVH". But in the absence of God the Father it is always Jesus Christ who is "YHVH".

When Jesus Christ said: "David himself therefore calls Him Lord; and whence is He then his son?" (Mark 12:37), Jesus Christ was saying that THERE IS AN ADDITIONAL DIMENSION to the Messiah, in addition to Him being a "son of David". And it is this additional dimension that underlies David calling "his son" Lord. The additional dimension is that the Messiah already existed long before David himself was ever born, that the Messiah was, in fact, the very God who had dealt with David, and was thus David's "LORD". The scribes and Pharisees obviously did not understand this.

So now back to Matthew 22 and Mark 12. In Mark's account we see Jesus Christ quoting TWO Old Testament passages that refer to Him as "God". In Deuteronomy 6:4 (quoted in Mark 12:29) Jesus Christ is identified as "YHVH". And in Psalm 110:1 (quoted in Mark 12:36) Jesus Christ is identified as "Adonai".

By quoting Deuteronomy 6:4 Jesus Christ was showing the absolute requirement of total submission to Him on the part of Israel and all mankind. Jesus Christ is the one "LORD" (YHVH) for Israel and for mankind in general. When He then continued and quoted Psalm 110:1, Christ was showing that He Himself is likewise in submission to God the Father. God the Father is the "LORD" (YHVH) in His relationship with Jesus Christ.

This is something the scribes and the Pharisees could not understand. However, I suspect that Jesus Christ introduced Psalm 110:1 into the discussion for the explicit benefit of the scribe "with the good attitude", to whom Christ had just discreetly said "you are not far from the kingdom of God". The scribes were well aware of Christ's claim to be the Son of God, and Psalm 110:1 should really have given this scribe a lot to think about.

It was the Apostle Paul, himself a former Pharisee, who later spelled out the distinction that this particular scribe "with the good attitude" should have come to see from considering Deuteronomy 6:4 together with Psalm 110:1. The Apostle Paul explained the following point to the Ephesians:

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; ONE LORD, one faith, one baptism, ONE GOD AND FATHER of all, WHO IS ABOVE ALL, and through all, and in you all.* (Ephesians 4:4-6)

There is one God who is known as "Lord" in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (i.e. Jesus

Christ); and there is another God who is known as "one God and Father", or more commonly as "God the Father". Paul understood this quite clearly. And Psalm 110:1 is a good starting point for coming to this understanding.

Let's now look at how the Jews have understood Deuteronomy 6:4.

### **HOW THE JEWS HAVE HISTORICALLY VIEWED DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

Apart from the Old Testament itself, the main record that has been preserved by the Jews is the Talmud, also called "the Oral Law". The Jewish sages who were associated with the writing, editing and preservation of the Talmud were known by different titles in different ages.

Thus, the sages who wrote the Mishnah (roughly from 70 A.D. to 200 A.D.) were known as the "tannaim". The sages who wrote the Gemara (roughly from 200 A.D. to 500 A.D.) were known as the "amoraim". Those sages who then edited the Talmud (roughly from 500 A.D. to 700 A.D.) were known as the "savoraim". Later titles need not concern us here.

[COMMENT: "Tanna" is an Aramaic word which means "to hand down orally". This title started to be used after the time of Hillel I. "Amora" is an Aramaic word that means "sayer, spokesman, interpreter". The Gemara is basically a commentary on, or interpretation of the Mishnah. The "savoraim" were Jewish scholars from Babylon about whom very little is known.]

The point we should note in our context is that any statements attributed to a specific "tanna" come from an earlier period than statements attributed to a specific "amora". This knowledge enables us to establish a relative dating sequence for various statements found in the Talmud.

Next, neither the books of the Old Testament nor specific passages had any titles. As a result the Jews very early resorted to incipit titling, meaning that the books of the Old Testament became known by the first word of the text of each book, and specific passages became known by the first word in each of those passages. Thus, the Book of Genesis is known in Hebrew as "Bereshith" (meaning "in a beginning"), the first word in Genesis 1:1; and the reading of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 became known as "the reading of the Shema", the first word of Deuteronomy 6:4.

Here is a quotation from the Talmud. The numbers in the text refer to footnotes in the text of the Talmud.

"We have learnt elsewhere:<sup>20</sup> The deputy high priest<sup>21</sup> said to them [the priests], Say one benediction, and they said the benediction and RECITED the Ten Commandments, the Shema', the section 'And it shall come to pass if ye hearken diligently', and 'And the Lord said',<sup>22</sup> and recited with the people three benedictions, ..." (Berachoth 11b)

And here are footnotes 20-22.

"(20) Tamid 32b.

(21) Memuneh; lit., 'the appointed one'; v. Yoma, Sonc. ed., p. 97, n. 3.

(22) The second and third sections of the Shema', Deut. XI, 13ff. and Num. XV, 37ff. V. P.B. p. 40ff."

This quotation shows that the daily temple rituals included the reading of FOUR passages, in this

sequence:

- 1) The Ten Commandments from Exodus 20
- 2) Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (the Shema)
- 3) Deuteronomy 11:13-21
- 4) Numbers 15:37-41

These same four passages are referred to as "reciting the ten commandments, and the first, second and third sections of the Shema" in Mishnah Tamid, Section 32b, start of Chapter 5. This is the quotation referred to in Footnote 20 of the above quotation.

In 1898 four papyrus fragments were discovered in Egypt and acquired by biblical scholars. These fragments, known as "the Nash Papyrus", consist of 24 lines of text. Photos of this text are available on the internet. This text has been dated to about 150 B.C., and it is the oldest existing record of Deuteronomy 6:4.

The Nash Papyrus is a historic document. The 24 lines of text consist of the ten commandments and Deuteronomy 6:4. These are only fragments of text, and it is clear that Deuteronomy 6:5-9 was also a part of the complete text of this papyrus because the fragments include the first few words from verse 5.

This papyrus was most likely used as a daily reading by a religious Egyptian Jew. (The ten commandments are in a different sequence from the Masoretic text, which need not concern us here.) Here we have two texts from two different OT books on one papyrus.

The point is that this endorses the statement quoted from the Talmud, that even before New Testament times the daily reading of certain passages had become a Jewish religious custom. All four of the passages that were read clearly focused on God's commandments. None of these passages were viewed as statements about the nature of God. The focus was exclusively on the need for obedience to God.

Specifically, in the reading from Deuteronomy 6 the focus was not on verse 4. Verse 4 was simply read as the introduction for this passage about obedience to God. The focus was on verses 5-9.

The Nash Papyrus shows that this passage from Deuteronomy 6 had already become prominent amongst the Jews more than 100 years before the ministry of Jesus Christ. And with this passage being so well-known the omission of verse 4, in both Matthew's and Luke's references to this passage, shows that verse 4 had at that time not yet achieved the status it enjoys amongst religious Jews today.

During the first century A.D. the public reading of the ten commandments was dropped due to pressure from some liberal Hellenistic Jews. From then onwards the remaining daily readings were collectively simply called "the Shema" (the first word of Deut 6:4), consisting of three sections, as indicated in the Talmud quotation above.

There is a rabbinic tradition regarding the origin of Deuteronomy 6:4, which tradition is recorded in the Palestinian Targums. While this tradition is absolutely wrong, it reveals how Deuteronomy 6:4 was understood during the period of the tannaim. This tradition claims that this verse originated when the sons of Jacob were gathered at their father's deathbed in Genesis 49. Because Jacob was (supposedly) worried that his sons might accept some form of idolatry, therefore his sons (supposedly) replied: "hear, O Israel (i.e. their father's name), our God is YHVH, YHVH alone".

This tradition is clearly without any merit. But it shows that the tannaim understood Deuteronomy 6:4 to be A STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT! They did NOT view this verse as a statement about God's nature. They did not attach any ontological meaning to this verse.

Put another way, the tannaim saw the recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4 as Israel's confession that YHVH was their only God. It was NOT in any way seen as a statement as to whether "other gods" exist or don't exist. This verse was seen, correctly so, as an expression of commitment to the true God alone, in contrast to Israel's frequent descent into Baal worship prior to the national captivities; it was not seen as a denial of the existence of any other "God" or "gods". Deuteronomy 6:4 was never used by the tannaim to assert that "other gods" simply don't exist. (Such a view only surfaced during the age of the amoraim in response to specific circumstances.)

This was the Jewish understanding at the time of Christ's ministry. This is not to say that the Jews believed that other "gods" existed; they didn't believe that. But their belief in this regard was NOT based on Deuteronomy 6:4. And it was with their correct understanding of Deut 6:4 in mind that Jesus Christ quoted this verse in Mark 12:29.

To summarize the Jewish understanding of Deuteronomy 6:4: During the age of the tannaim, in a world where every nation around them accepted a multiplicity of gods, Deuteronomy 6:4 was seen as Israel's emphatic position of accepting and serving ONLY ONE GOD. The statement was seen as focusing on what was expected from Israel, not on what God's attributes might be.

### **Then something changed!**

By the end of the period of the tannaim Christianity had been around for just under 200 years. And while the true Church of God was being persecuted, a false Christianity was growing in size and in influence. It was during the period of the amoraim that this false Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. And persecution of the Jews started to grow.

Christianity used the same Scriptures which the Jews claimed as their own. Not only that, but Christianity also claimed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that He therefore was God. These things presented an enormous threat to the whole religious belief system of the Jews. It was as if their religion was in danger of being taken over.

It was in response to these threats to their very existence (religiously speaking) that the amoraim CHANGED the interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4! This verse was then used in an attempt to refute the Christian claim that Jesus Christ was the Son of the God of Abraham. It would not have been any problem for the Jews if Christianity had claimed that Jesus Christ was "the son of Zeus or Jupiter or Neptune or Diana of the Ephesians", etc. The Jews could not have cared less about any such claims. But when Christianity claimed that Jesus Christ was the Son of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, then THAT was perceived as an enormous threat to the very existence of the Jewish religion.

Therefore in response to this threat from Christianity the amoraim interpreted Deuteronomy 6:4 as a statement of the supposed immutability of the one single God Being, a God Being who was (supposedly) incapable of ever changing the circumstances of His existence. He was "one" and therefore (supposedly) there could never be any other God Beings like the God of Israel; no other being could ever (supposedly) become "a Son" of the God whom Israel worshipped.

We should recognize that the current Jewish explanation for Deuteronomy 6:4 was formulated by the amoraim WITH THE EXPLICIT PURPOSE OF DENYING THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD!

This changed explanation for Deuteronomy 6:4 was many centuries later further reinforced by the rise of

Islam. When the Muslims claimed "there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet", it was Deuteronomy 6:4 that the Jewish religious leaders presented in defense against this Muslim influence.

An example of this Jewish desire to use Deuteronomy 6:4 to deny the deity of Jesus Christ is found in the 1853 Isaac Leeser Old Testament Translation. Leeser was an American Jewish scholar. Here is his translation of this verse.

"Hear, O Israel! THE LORD, our God, IS THE ONE ETERNAL BEING." (Deuteronomy 6:4 Leeser)

This is NOT a translation of the Hebrew text at all! This is pure Jewish theology! This is an interpretation, not a translation, of the Hebrew text, to make it fit the theological requirements of the Jewish religion. Note also the effective use of punctuation to achieve the desired effect. Punctuation can have a powerful impact.

We need to recognize that modern Jewish explanations for this verse are clearly biased. The claim that Deuteronomy 6:4 speaks about "the oneness of God" requires a person to lift this verse out of its total context, which context we examined earlier. Nothing before this verse and nothing after this verse even remotely hints at the subject of "the oneness of God". The "oneness" claim flies in the face of everything else that is said in the greater context of this verse.

It should not come as a surprise that any church groups that assert the "oneness of God" will also appeal to the present Jewish explanation for Deuteronomy 6:4 for support, conveniently ignoring the earlier explanation provided by the tannaim. The amoraim had the clearly ulterior motive of discrediting the deity of Jesus Christ in the new interpretation they provided for this verse.

For the Jews the reading of the Shema became their defense against the threats posed by Christianity (and later also by Islam). And more and more the title "Shema" was applied to just one verse, Deuteronomy 6:4.

Let's now examine the Hebrew text of this verse.

### **THE HEBREW TEXT OF DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

As we saw at the start, the Hebrew text for this verse reads:

"Shema Israel YHVH Eloheinu YHVH echad."

The meanings of the words Israel, Elohim and YHVH are easy to understand. "Israel" refers to the nations descended from the man Israel, "Elohim" is the Hebrew word normally translated as "God", and "Eloheinu" means "our God", and "YHVH" basically means "the Eternal" and is usually translated as "LORD" in the KJV.

That leaves just two words for us to examine more closely: the word "shema" and the word "echad". Let's start with a look at "shema". In this six-word sequence "shema" is the only verb.

### **"SHEMA" IN DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

The basic meaning of the verb "shama" is "to hear, to perceive a sound or a message". When this verb is used in the imperative mood (i.e. "shema"), as is the case in this verse, then it typically conveys a

command or a request. When GOD is in some way involved in this use of "shema", then it invariably refers to a command.

The verb "shama" is used over 1100 times in the Old Testament. In the KJV there are very many instances where it is translated as "OBEY" even when this verb is NOT used in the imperative mood.

Here is a partial list, consisting of 50 verses, where the verb "shama" is translated in the KJV as "obey" or as "obedient". In a considerable number of these cases "shama" is not even in the imperative mood, yet "obey" is still CLEARLY the correct translation, as evidenced by the context.

"SHAMA" = OBEY or OBEDIENT in the KJV:

**Genesis** 22:18; 26:5; 27:8, 13, 43; 28:7; **Exodus** 5:2; 19:5; 23:21, 22; 24:7

**Deuteronomy** 4:30; 11:27, 28; 13:4; 21:18, 20; 27:10; 28:62; 30:2, 8, 20

**Joshua** 5:6; 24:24; **Judges** 2:2; **1 Samuel** 8:19; 12:14, 15; 15:19, 22

**Nehemiah** 9:17; Job 36:11, 12; **Psalms** 18:44; **Isaiah** 1:19; 42:24; 50:10

**Jeremiah** 7:23; 9:13; 11:4, 7; 12:17; 18:10; 26:13; 35:14; 38:20; 42:6, 13

**Daniel** 9:11; **Zechariah** 6:15

Even a casual examination of the above Scriptures will show HOW VERY APPROPRIATE the words "obey" and "obedient" are as a translation of the Hebrew verb "shama". This is especially true when this verb is used in the imperative mood in a statement which is directed towards God!

So when in Deuteronomy 6:4, a verse that speaks about God, "shema" is only translated as "hear", then we are dealing with an attempt to ignore, or at least to minimize the imperative mood in this specific context.

There is a very important reason why the translators, who have accepted the modern Jewish interpretation of this verse, have tried to downplay the imperative mood of "shama" in this verse. The point is simply this:

**THE IMPERATIVE MOOD DEMANDS AN OBJECT!**

Once we understand that this text should read: "OBEY, O Israel", then the immediate question is: WHO OR WHAT is Israel supposed to obey? The command to obey demands an object, either SOMEONE (e.g. God) who is to be obeyed, or SOMETHING (e.g. God's laws and statutes and judgments) that is to be obeyed. In the Hebrew text of this verse the (grammatical) object for obedience is clearly "the LORD our God". Clearly this verse commands us to obey "the LORD our God".

But to follow the command "obey" with a statement about the supposed nature of God is UTTERLY ABSURD! It is an oxymoron to link a statement about God's supposed nature to the command to obey! The KJV translation of this verse (to say nothing of Leeser's translation) has butchered the correct meaning of the Hebrew text. The effect of the colon in this verse in the KJV is TO AMPUTATE the rest of the thought from the verb that expresses the command to obey. Before and during the age of the tannaim the Jews had NEVER attempted to turn Deuteronomy 6:4 into a statement about God's supposed nature. THAT only came much later.

Let's compare the grammatical structure of Deuteronomy 4:1 with Deuteronomy 6:4.

DEUTERONOMY 4:1 reads as follows (English meanings in parentheses):

**"Veattah** (so now) **Israel** (O Israel) **shema** (hearken or obey) **el** (unto) **hahukim** (the statutes) **ve-el** (and unto) **hamishpatim** (the judgments) ..."

DEUTERONOMY 6:4 reads as follows:

**"shema** (hearken or obey) **Israel** (O Israel) **YHVH** (the Eternal) **Eloheinu** (our God) **YHVH** (the Eternal) **echad** (alone)"

When we consider these two verses, which both start with the imperative statement "shema Israel" (the Hebrew adverb "attah" does not affect this discussion), then we see that in the Hebrew text they follow the same syntax. This whole section starts in Deuteronomy 4:1 with a command regarding WHAT Israel is to obey; i.e. God's statutes and judgments. And this whole section then concludes in Deuteronomy 6:4-6 with a summary command regarding WHO Israel is to obey (verse 4) and HOW Israel is to obey (verse 5). The "WHO" is the Eternal our God, the Eternal alone; and the "HOW" is with an attitude of integrity and total commitment.

In the Hebrew text the opening words in both verses have an object to which they apply. In the English KJV the translators correctly provided the object for the opening words in 4:1. But in 6:4 the translators used punctuation to deny the opening words their legitimate object. That represents a mistranslation.

These two verses show us an example of where the translators have used punctuation to translate the identical syntax found in two different verses in completely different ways. The way they translated 4:1 is correct; and the way they translated 6:4 is biased and wrong, to agree with the changed explanation provided by the Jewish amoraim.

Now let's look at the Hebrew word "echad".

### **"ECHAD" IN DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

This word is used over 900 times in the Hebrew text of the OT. It is used as an adjective, as a noun, as an adverb, as a cardinal number (i.e. "one") and as an ordinal number (i.e. "first"). Its main meaning is "one" and concepts associated with "one". The word "echad" also has a plural form "achadim", something we might not expect from a word meaning "one".

In Genesis 11:1 we have an example of both forms being used in one verse. This verse reads, with key Hebrew words included:

"And the whole earth was of one (ECHAD) language, and of one (ACHADIM) speech (DEBARIM)."

"Debarim" means "words". The plural "achadim" modifies the word "debarim". This expression obviously cannot be rendered into English as "ONE words". It really means something like "one set of words", or, more appropriately, "THE SAME set of words". In other words, at that time all people spoke the same language with the same vocabulary available to all people.

The plural "achadim" is also used in Scriptures like Genesis 27:44 and Genesis 29:20, where it is translated as "A FEW" (in the expression "a few days"). In these verses the plural of "echad" certainly does not mean "one".

Here are some Scriptures where "echad" is used with a meaning other than "one". In each case I have rendered the translation of "echad" in CAPITAL LETTERS for easier identification.

"Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not ALONE (echad) in his iniquity." (Joshua 22:20)

"Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom ALONE (echad) God hath chosen, *is yet* young and tender, and the work *is* great: for the palace *is* not for man, but for the LORD God." (1 Chronicles 29:1)

"Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah *that* bare you: for I called him ALONE (echad), and blessed him, and increased him." (Isaiah 51:2)

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; An evil, an ONLY (echad) evil, behold, is come." (Ezekiel 7:5)

These examples show that the word "echad" at times really means "ALONE" or "ONLY". Let's understand why one Hebrew word can at the same time mean "one" and also "alone" and "only".

Consider:

Frequently "alone" is really another way of saying "ONE IN A CONTEXT OF MANY". Thus, in the context of all Israel Achan was not the only one who perished (Joshua 22:20); God chose Solomon as one amongst many sons of David (1 Chron 29:1); God called one man, Abraham, from amongst many people (Isaiah 51:2).

Likewise, there are many circumstances where "only" also simply means "one in a context of many". The "only evil" of Ezekiel 7:5 is really just one evil in the context of MANY others that are also poured out at the end time (e.g. the seven trumpets and the seven plagues of Revelation, etc.).

So when "echad" correctly means "alone" or "only" it is still expressing a certain aspect of "one", because these words (alone, only) focus on the selection of one from amongst (potentially) many others. In many contexts "alone" and "only" do not deny the existence of other things or individuals. THEY SIMPLY HIGHLIGHT A SELECTION PROCESS. That is also true for Deuteronomy 6:4.

Next, consider the grammatical structure we find in Ezekiel 7. Notice:

VERSE 2 = AN END, THE END is come ...

VERSE 5 = AN EVIL, AN ONLY EVIL is come ...

VERSE 6 = AN END is come, THE END is come ...

DEUT 6:4 = O Israel, obey THE ETERNAL our God, THE ETERNAL ALONE.

Deuteronomy 6:4 follows the same grammatical construction as does Ezekiel 7:2, 5, 6. It is a form of emphasis.



By the time Moses presented these commandments and statutes and judgments to Israel, Israel had ALREADY REPEATEDLY become involved in idolatry! The issue was not whether those pagan deities actually existed or whether they were the figments of the imagination of pagan people. THE FACTS were that Israel had at times gotten involved in idolatry (the golden calf, etc.).

That is why shortly before Deuteronomy 6:4 Moses had repeated the words God had spoken, including the statement "YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME" (Deuteronomy 5:7). It wasn't an academic debate as to whether or not those pagan "gods" actually existed. The point is that they were A REAL THREAT to Israel's commitment to God. And so even GOD right in the context of the ten commandments spoke as if pagan gods exist. Ultimately these pagan "gods" DO EXIST, simply because every form of idolatry really amounts to worshipping Satan, and Satan certainly exists! That is why the Apostle Paul referred to Satan as "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Paul continued to explain the following to the Corinthians:

"But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, THEY SACRIFICE TO DEVILS, (i.e. demons) and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils." (1 Corinthians 10:20)

The Apostle Paul, an ex-Pharisee, didn't believe that Deuteronomy 6:4 speaks about "the oneness of God", because he understood that all the pagan religions treated DEMONS like gods! When we carefully consider what Paul has said here in 1 Corinthians 10:20, it should be clear that he was coming from a premise of "O Israel, obey YHWH our Elohim, YHWH alone"! Here Paul has simply presented the warning God Himself provided in Deuteronomy 6:4 from a different vantage point.

So yes, the Hebrew word "echad" most often means "one". But the above quotations show that it ALSO at times conveys the idea of "only" or "alone". These quotations show that "echad" at times also refers to a selection process, rather than to exclusive existence. And it is in this sense of referring to a selection process that "echad" is used in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Now let's look at the correct way to translate this verse.

#### **THE CORRECT TRANSLATION OF DEUTERONOMY 6:4**

By now the correct translation of this verse should be quite clear. It should be translated basically as follows:

"O Israel, hearken unto the Eternal our God, the Eternal alone."

Or:

"Obey, O Israel, the Eternal our God, the Eternal only."

Or:

"Pay attention, O Israel, to the Eternal our God, the Eternal alone."

Or:

"O Israel, listen to the Eternal our God, the Eternal alone." etc.

Here is how this verse is translated somewhat more correctly in the NRSV than it is in the KJV:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone." (Deuteronomy 6:4 NRSV)

And here is the 1902 Rotherham Translation, which is similar:

"Hear, O Israel: Yahweh is our God, --Yahweh alone." (Deuteronomy 6:4 Rotherham)

And here is this verse from the 1537 Matthew's Bible. (Comment: This was printed before the text was divided into verses, and this verse represents the start of the second paragraph in chapter 6.)

"O heare (sic) Israel, the Lord thy God is Lord only." (1537 Matthew's Bible)

And here is this verse from the 1560 Geneva Translation, with original spelling:

"Heare, o Israel, The Lord our God *is* Lord onely." (1560 Geneva Translation)

The 1595 Bishops Bible is identical to this 1560 Geneva text (except for one spelling change).

While all of these five translations are better than the KJV, all of them have unfortunately retained the artificial division into two distinct thoughts (originally achieved by incorrect punctuation). That is wrong! But that is a consequence of accepting "hear" as a suitable translation for the imperative mood of the Hebrew verb. When the imperative verb "shema" is translated as "hear" it is MUCH EASIER to get away with denying this imperative verb its legitimate object. When this imperative verb is translated as "obey", it becomes almost impossible to not provide the legitimate object of that command "to obey". And that is precisely why NONE of the translations have rendered "shema" as "obey", even though the KJV has in over 80 OTHER PLACES provided the translation "obey" for the verb "shama" quite freely.

At the very least the above translations should have used "hearken", which means "to give RESPECTFUL attention to something". Better is "pay attention to" or "obey". But translating this verb as "hear" is just too vague to effectively convey the imperative mood! However, translating "echad" as "alone" or as "only" in all five of the above translations is definitely more appropriate than translating it as "one".

Now a few chapters later Moses again conveyed the identical point that is made in Deuteronomy 6:4. Deuteronomy 12 starts with the statement: "these are the statutes and judgments which you shall observe ..." (Verse 1). Verse 29 then speaks about entering the land of Canaan. Then Moses wrote:

"TAKE HEED TO THYSELF that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and THAT THOU ENQUIRE NOT AFTER THEIR GODS, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise." (Deuteronomy 12:30)

"Take heed to yourself" means: be on your guard, Israel! And be VERY CAREFUL that you do NOT enquire about the idolatrous customs of the pagans! This is EXACTLY what is addressed in Deuteronomy 6:4. The instruction "don't enquire after their gods" is just another way of saying "only listen to the Lord our God, the Lord alone". Deuteronomy 12:30 makes exactly the same point as Deuteronomy 6:4.

In Jeremiah 10:1 God said: "HEAR (the imperative form "shema") you the word which the LORD speaks unto you, O house of Israel". This creates the identical setting to the start of Deuteronomy 6:4. Then verse 2 reads:

"Thus saith the LORD, LEARN NOT THE WAY OF THE HEATHEN, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them." (Jeremiah 10:2)

Again, "DON'T LEARN the way of the heathen" is just another way of saying "obey ONLY the Eternal our God, the Eternal alone".

We should recognize that THE UNDERLYING CONCEPT conveyed by Deuteronomy 6:4 is addressed repeatedly by God, because it was a major concern! And that concern was certainly justified, since Israel repeatedly descended into idolatry.

With a correct translation of Deuteronomy 6:4 clearly established, we are now in a position to examine the translation of Mark 12:29, since in the KJV the wording of these two verses is identical.

### **THE MEANING OF MARK 12:29**

The KJV text of Mark 12:29 reads: "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord". The Greek text underlying this translation is as follows:

**"akoue** (hear) **Israel** (O Israel) **kurios** (Lord) **ho** (the) **theos** (God) **hemon** (of us) **kurios** (Lord) **heis** (one) **estin** (is)."

First of all, notice that here in the KJV the translators have ALSO used punctuation to divide this Greek statement into two distinct thoughts. In Deuteronomy 6:4 they used a colon after the expression "hear O Israel", and here in Mark 12:29 they used a semicolon after this expression. They have treated the colon and the semicolon as if they are the same. And the results are basically the same: in both cases the original statement is artificially divided into two distinct thoughts. The semicolon here is just as uncalled for as is the colon in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Next, let's keep in mind that this verse represents a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:4. Now while the gospel accounts are recorded in the Greek language, we should keep in mind that JESUS CHRIST DIDN'T ACTUALLY MAKE ANY OF THESE STATEMENTS IN THE GREEK LANGUAGE! Jesus Christ conducted His entire ministry in the Aramaic language. And when Jesus Christ quoted passages from the Old Testament, then He quoted those passages in the Hebrew language, not in Aramaic, and certainly not in Greek.

To make this quite clear:

Here in Mark 12:29 Jesus Christ was dealing with "a scribe", a scholar of the Hebrew text. Therefore Jesus Christ MOST CERTAINLY quoted this passage in Hebrew! There is no way that Christ would somehow have quoted this passage from one of the Aramaic language targums, because that would have destroyed His credibility in the eyes of these Hebrew scholars. Jesus Christ quoted this in Hebrew.

So, IRRESPECTIVE OF WHAT THE GREEK TEXT HERE MAY SAY, it is absolutely certain that the literal words Jesus Christ spoke in Mark 12:29 were:

## **"shema Israel YHVH Eloheinu YHVH echad".**

Jesus Christ did NOT actually say the Greek words "akoue Israel kurios ho theos hemon kurios heis estin"! Christ said the words "shema Israel YHVH Eloheinu YHVH echad". There is simply no other possibility!

The words "akoue Israel kurios ho theos hemon kurios heis estin" are how Mark chose to translate Jesus Christ's Hebrew quotation "shema Israel YHVH Eloheinu YHVH echad", simply because Mark was forced to present this quotation in the Greek language. But IN THIS INSTANCE the literal words Jesus Christ said stand beyond question, simply because Christ was presenting an Old Testament quotation to a Hebrew scholar, and the Hebrew text of this quotation stands beyond any doubts.

Now Mark obviously provided this Greek translation for the benefit of those people who did not understand Hebrew. He did not provide this quotation in Greek for the benefit of people who understand the meaning of the Hebrew text in Deuteronomy 6:4. For anyone who CLEARLY understands what the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 6:4 means, the Greek text of Mark 12:29 is only of value in as far as it agrees with the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 6:4. In his Greek translation Mark had no intention to somehow compete with the correct meaning of the Hebrew text; Mark was simply helping people who spoke Greek but who did not understand Hebrew.

Now because Jesus Christ actually said these words IN HEBREW, therefore it doesn't matter whether the Greek verb "akoue" presents the same meaning as the imperative Hebrew verb "shema" or not. Nor does it matter whether the Greek word "heis" which is translated as "one" also means "alone" and "only" or not. Nor does it matter whether the Greek text provides the verb for "is" or does not provide that verb. We'll look at all these points, but they don't really affect the CORRECT meaning of Mark 12:29! The correct meaning of Mark 12:29 is established EXCLUSIVELY BY THE CORRECT MEANING OF THE HEBREW TEXT IN DEUTERONOMY 6:4, since that Hebrew text is actually what Jesus Christ LITERALLY said in this instance. This is certain beyond any shadow of doubt!

THEREFORE:

IF any of the Greek words in Mark 12:29 have A RANGE OF MEANINGS OR APPLICATIONS, with some meanings agreeing with the incorrect text presented for Deuteronomy 6:4 in the KJV, while OTHER LEGITIMATE MEANINGS agree with THE CORRECT meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4, THEN the meanings intended by the author Mark are most certainly the ones that agree with the correct meaning of the Hebrew text. It doesn't matter whether these meanings are "the main meanings" of these words or whether they are "secondary meanings".

The point is: In Mark 12:29 Mark did his best to convey the CORRECT meaning of the Hebrew words Jesus Christ had spoken here. And since in this instance we know with absolute certainty the literal Hebrew words that Jesus Christ spoke, therefore the Greek text must be examined from the premise of the correct meaning of the Hebrew text. This is the foundation from which this Greek text must be examined.

But this is not the way any of the English language translators have approached this verse. In their translations they all limit themselves to applying the most common meanings to the Greek words in this verse, irrespective of whether those "common meanings" convey Mark's intentions or not. And they all translate this verse incorrectly.

So let's look at this Greek text.

The Greek verb "akoue" is the imperative mood of the verb "akouo". This verb means: to hear, to

hearken, to give audience, etc. In the imperative mood this expresses either a command or a request. Thus this Greek verb here is very much in agreement with the Hebrew verb "shema" in Deuteronomy 6:4; it conveys the same thought as "shema".

Thus Mark CORRECTLY translated "shema" into Greek as "akoue".

Now note! While "akoue" MAY present either a command or a request, it is clear beyond doubt that the Hebrew verb "shema" conveys A COMMAND in Deuteronomy 6:4 (because the focus of "shema" is on God). THEREFORE this Greek imperative verb "akoue" MUST also convey a command in Mark 12:29! "A request" is simply not an option for Mark 12:29, because a request is not an option for Deuteronomy 6:4.

Can you understand this? If a request is not an option for Deuteronomy 6:4, then in the Hebrew text Jesus Christ literally spoke in Mark 12:29 a request can also not be an option! Therefore in this verse "akoue" MUST mean a command and not a request.

Next, the imperative verb in this Greek text ALSO REQUIRES AN OBJECT to which this command must apply. Here the KJV translators again used punctuation to deprive this imperative verb of its legitimate object.

ALL THE TRANSLATORS have downplayed the imperative mood of this Greek verb. And ALL of them have denied this verb the object to which this verb applies, i.e. WHO or WHAT Israel is to obey or to hearken to.

Next, the Greek word "heis" basically means one. Mark no doubt chose this Greek word "heis" because it agrees with the Hebrew word "echad". Let's notice another place where Mark also used this word "heis".

"Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God ONLY (Greek "heis")?" (Mark 2:7)

In Mark 2:7 the word "only" is the translation of the Greek word "heis". And in the context of Mark 2:7 "only" is certainly a very appropriate translation for "heis". "Alone" would have been an equally correct translation here. Thus we see that Mark elsewhere used the word "heis" to mean "only" or "alone". THEREFORE we should conclude that in Mark 12:29 the writer Mark likewise used "heis" to convey the concept of "only" or "alone", because that is the CLEAR meaning in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Now while the Hebrew text of Deut 6:4 does NOT contain the verb "is", in his Greek text of Mark 12:29 Mark did include the verb "is" (i.e. "estin" in Greek). So Mark 12:29 should basically read:

**"Obey, O Israel, the Lord our God, He alone is Lord."**

Or:

**"Obey, O Israel, the Lord our God, who only is Lord."**

Mark was clearly trying to capture the meaning of what Jesus Christ had quoted in Hebrew. And these two options convey that correct meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4.

As far as these two possible translations are concerned, we should keep the following two things in mind:

First of all, the endings of Greek verbs already imply the pronouns that are involved. Thus "estin" doesn't just mean "is"; it really means "HE IS", third person singular. Now when a noun or pronoun is provided in the text for "estin", then there is no need to also include the pronoun "he" in the translation. That is the case in the KJV. There the translators applied the verb "estin" to the phrase "the Lord our God".

However, when the text does NOT provide a noun or pronoun for the verb "estin" to apply to, then the translation into English requires the translator to provide the pronoun. That is what I have done in the above corrected translations.

Secondly, because a pronoun is always implied with a Greek verb, therefore it is frequently also quite appropriate to provide the word "who" in a translation into English, even when the word for "who" is not contained in the Greek text. Here are some examples of places where the KJV translators provided the word "who", even though the Greek text does NOT contain a specific word that means "who":

MATTHEW 25:14 = WHO called his own servants ...

MARK 13:34 = WHO left his own house ...

MARK 15:21 = WHO passed by ...

ACTS 11:17 = unto us WHO believed ..., etc.

These are just a few of the very many cases where the translators freely (and appropriately!) provided the word "who" even though this word is strictly speaking not found in the Greek text.

I believe that in Mark 12:29 it would also be very appropriate to provide the word "who" for the last part of this sentence; i.e. "WHO only is Lord", instead of "HE only is Lord". "WHO" makes this text more readable in English than the pronoun "HE". But this is only a minor point.

Originally Mark's Gospel did not contain any punctuation. Punctuation was arbitrarily provided by the various translators, based on how they themselves interpreted the text. Now Mark 12:29 does contain two verbs, and thus it conveys two distinct thoughts. But how to divide this verse into two distinct thoughts depends on how one understands this verse.

In the absence of any original punctuation there are TWO possible ways to divide this verse:

1) "akoue Israel" FOLLOWED BY "kurios ho theos hemon kurios heis estin".

2) "akoue Israel kurios ho theos hemon" FOLLOWED BY "kurios heis estin".

The first option above is the traditional way of interpreting this statement. It is based on the way Deuteronomy 6:4 has been divided in the KJV, although Deuteronomy 6:4 does NOT provide a verb for the second part of the sentence. In this scenario the imperative verb "akoue" does not have an object to which it can be applied. Therefore this verb must be translated as "hear" rather than as "obey". In this division the first statement says "HEAR, O ISRAEL", and the second statement says "THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD".

The second option above is the correct way to understand this Greek sentence. This option is fully compatible with the correct meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4, which correct meaning was always understood prior to the time when the amoraim changed the explanation for this verse in order to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. In this division the imperative verb "akoue" has the object "the Lord our God". In this division the first statement says "OBEY, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD", and the second statement

says "HE ALONE IS LORD", or alternatively, "WHO ALONE IS LORD".

This second option (i.e. dividing this sentence after "hemon" instead of after "Israel") is grammatically just as correct as is the other option. People who accept the first option above do not understand that they are simply accepting an explanation that was invented to deny Jesus Christ's deity.

Even the rabbinic tradition regarding the origin of Deuteronomy 6:4 shows that the Jews at the time of Christ's ministry understood the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 6:4 to be in agreement with the second option I have provided above for the NT Greek text of this OT Hebrew verse.

Thus:

The best way to translate Deuteronomy 6:4 is:

"O Israel, obey the Lord our God, the Lord alone."

And the best way to translate Mark 12:29 is:

"O Israel, obey the Lord our God, who only is Lord."

And that about covers everything. So let's summarize what we have seen regarding Deuteronomy 6:4 and regarding Mark 12:29.

### **IN SUMMARY**

1) In the Hebrew text this verse consists of six words, only one of which is a verb. The one verb means that these six words form ONE cohesive statement, and grammatically there is no room for turning this into two separate statements, one consisting of only two words, and the other consisting of four words. Such a construction is very artificial.

2) The punctuation provided by the KJV (the colon) creates a very artificial division, incorrectly severing the verb from the last four words of the Hebrew text.

3) The whole context of this verse is about the need for Israel to obey God. There is no statement anywhere in this context about God's supposed nature.

4) The verb "shema" is in the imperative form, making this statement a command.

5) Virtually all translations partially obscure this fact by rendering "shema" as "hear".

6) Grammatically the imperative demands an object, someone or something that is to be obeyed. When the first two words ("shema Israel") are translated as a command, then a statement about God's supposed "oneness" is totally inappropriate.

7) The Nash Papyrus, in conjunction with the Talmud, shows that the custom of reciting the ten commandments, followed by Deuteronomy 6:4-9, followed by Deuteronomy 11:13-21, followed by Numbers 15:37-41 was well established over 100 years before Christ's ministry. All of these passages focus on the need for obedience to God. THAT is why these specific passages were chosen as daily readings.

8) Talmudic evidence shows that during the age of the tannaim (i.e. before 200 A.D.) Deuteronomy 6:4 was still understood to be an affirmation of accepting YHVH as Israel's only Lord, rather than being a

statement about God's nature.

9) While the tradition of linking this verse to the sons of Israel in Genesis 49 is clearly incorrect, this tradition does reveal HOW this verse was understood at that time. It was understood to read: our God is YHVH, YHVH alone.

10) When Jesus Christ quoted this passage in the New Testament (Mark 12:29-30), it was the first step in showing that already in Old Testament times the Godhead consisted of TWO distinct individuals. This intention is evident because Christ immediately followed up Deuteronomy 6:4-5 with Psalm 110:1 (Mark 12:35-37). Christ's main purpose in quoting Psalm 110 was to provide the proof for the existence of TWO members in the God Family.

11) There is a distinction between saying: the KURIOS our THEOS is one KURIOS, and the theoretical statement: the KURIOS our THEOS is one THEOS. To state that there is "one Lord" is not the same as saying that there is "one God". Paul explained this distinction in Ephesians 4:4-6, by pointing out that "Lord" refers to Jesus Christ, the only God who dealt directly with mankind during OT times, and that "God" in the same context refers to God the Father.

12) In the Old Testament it is the context which shows whether the name "YHVH" refers to God the Father (very rarely), or whether it refers to Jesus Christ.

13) It was the amoraim who, well after 200 A.D., changed the explanation for Deuteronomy 6:4. They did this for the explicit purpose of having a Scripture to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. We need to understand very clearly that the only reason for the statement "the LORD our God is one LORD" is to deny that Jesus Christ is also God!

14) The Matthew's Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Bishops Bible all translated "echad" in this verse as "only". It was the 1611 KJV that first introduced the word "one" into this verse, very likely in response to pressure from some of the Hebrew scholars on their committee, who in turn were influenced by the Jewish explanation of this verse.

15) The extremely flawed 1853 Leeser translation of this verse is one of the more extreme Jewish attempts to discredit the deity of Jesus Christ. But this Leeser translation reflects precisely the new meaning the amoraim attached to this verse some time after 200 A.D.

16) In Deuteronomy 6 it is verse 4 that states WHO Israel was to obey, and it is verse 5 that states HOW Israel is to obey.

17) Basically, Deuteronomy 6:4 says: "O Israel, listen to and obey the Eternal our God, the Eternal alone". This verse is an instruction for Israel to obey the only God who had dealt with human beings up to that point in time, Jesus Christ, who was known to Israel at that time as "YHVH".

18) Mark 12:29 fully agrees with this explanation for Deuteronomy 6:4.

19) It is clear that in Mark 12:29 Jesus Christ LITERALLY said the Hebrew words recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4. Christ actually never said any of the GREEK words contained in Mark 12:29. They are Mark's translation for Jesus Christ's Hebrew statement.

20) Mark used the imperative verb "akoue" to correctly capture the meaning of the Hebrew "shema".

21) As in the Hebrew text, so also here in the Greek text, the imperative verb demands an object, SOMEONE who is to be obeyed.



22) In Mark 2:7 Mark used the Greek word "heis" with the meaning of "only" or "alone". This is also in agreement with the Hebrew word "echad" including the meanings "only" and "alone".

23) Since Mark included the Greek verb for "he is" in his text, therefore we need to correctly divide the text of Mark 12:29 into two distinct statements. The correct division is: "Obey, O Israel, the Lord our God" FOLLOWED BY "who alone is Lord". It is the correct division into these two statements that shows that "heis" must here be translated as "alone" or as "only".

24) Let's keep in mind that it is only since the start of the New Testament, when Jesus Christ came "to reveal the Father", that access to God the Father was opened up to human beings. It was then that Jesus Christ instructed us to pray TO THE FATHER. And SINCE His ministry Jesus Christ is now known as "the Savior" and as "the Son of God" and as "the Word", while also STILL being known as "the Lord".

25) But Deuteronomy 6:4 has nothing whatsoever to do with "how many members there are currently in the Family of God". Currently there are two: God the Father and Jesus Christ. Later many, many others will also become a part of that Family.

Frank W. Nelte