

Immerse Day 69 :: May 6

Monotheism: the worship of one God while denying the existence of any others.

The three monotheistic religions today are Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Each of these three religions worship only one God, and all three deny that other gods exist. But even more interesting is the fact that all three claim to worship the same god. This causes a lot of trouble with the adherents of each in their interactions with the others. But this is not my topic today.

In the time when Deuteronomy was written, monotheism was rare at best. So this group of former slaves coming along and claiming not only that their god was the strongest and best (every nation said that!) but that He was the **ONLY** god was unique. In a culture where every nation had its own god, tied to their land and “for” their people, any group claiming that the other gods weren’t real caused a stir.

We find the clarion call of the Jewish people here in Deut. 6, and is the call to monotheism: “Hear, O Israel. The Lord your God, the Lord is One! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.” This call, called the Shema, is one of the most famous creeds of the Old Testament.

So I was really surprised to read today’s text which includes the Shema. I’m all for contemporary language. In fact, I think it brings a freshness to the bible that we often lose out of love for our particular translation. But hear the Shema from our reading today: “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” This translation is indeed just a translation, but it changes the focus of the Shema. What was once the defining characteristic of Israel – a monotheistic belief that the Lord is One (“and only” is often assumed), now becomes a mere statement about which God Israel serves, “the Lord alone.” What was once a uniqueness (think “holiness”) among God’s people is now a statement that any people could make about their own god.

Both of these statements need to be true. Indeed Yahweh is “the one and only God”. And He is also the only God we serve. This reading should bring a few questions to mind for us. Am I serving any other gods besides Yahweh? Do I worship any other things? Are there any other things worth worshipping?

Take some time today not to proclaim a theological truth, but to consider whether our lives proclaim it as much as our mouths.