

Hear, O Muslims!

by Anthony Rogers

The Shema, a Jewish confession of faith, stands in stark contrast to the Shahada, the Islamic confession of faith, highlighting the differences in their views of God and salvation.

Scripture: Exodus 3:14

Topics: "Christian Apologetics", "Interfaith Comparison"

Description

Anthony Rogers discusses the contrast between the Shema found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and the Shahada in Islam. The Shema emphasizes God's covenant with Israel, the personal self-designation of Yahweh, the unity of God, and the absence of any mention of Muhammad. This highlights the fundamental differences between the two faiths, showing that belief in the Shahada and the Shema are mutually exclusive.

Transcript

Introduction

A number of Muslims point to the Shema - originally found in Deuteronomy 6:4 and quoted by Jesus in the New Testament accounts of the Gospel (Mark 12:29-30; and Luke 10:27) - as evidence for the antiquity and universality of Islam as well as for its continuity with prior revelation.¹ In the view of these Muslims, the Shema corresponds to and confirms, even as it is thought to be confirmed by, their confession of faith, the Shahada, as well as other teachings of the Qur'an that are held to explicate this confession. No doubt the motivation for this stems in part from Muhammad's claim that the Qur'an is a confirmation of what came before it in the Torah and the Gospel (e.g. S. 3:3).

Notwithstanding the above, the Shema found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and the Shahada which Muslims splice together from contextually unrelated verses of the Qur'an (and/or from post-Quranic traditions), stand in total contrast to one another, putting those who look to the Shema as proof for their contentions on the horns of a dilemma.

Never the Twain Shall Meet

The following points draw out and elucidate just how the Shema stands over against Islam and its Shahada.

To begin with, the Shema is addressed to God's covenant people - Israel: "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one." Of course the God of Israel is the creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16), but the point here is that Israel is the nation that God chose out of the world to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6), a people who were to set forth and declare to the world by their example, like a city set on a hill, the way of salvation and righteousness (Deuteronomy 4:5-7). It was from among them that God called prophets, commissioning and anointing them to publish His saving will (Psalm 147:19-20).² Accordingly, when God brought forth the Messiah, Jesus, it was from among the people of Israel, and Jesus in turn appointed Israelite apostles, all of whom were sent first to the Jews, to whom and through whom the oracles of God were given (Romans 3:2), and after that told them to go to the Gentiles (Acts 1:8). As should be obvious, Muhammad was not an Israelite, and neither did he go first to the Jews and Christians, the appropriate order if they were given the covenants of the Promise and the Scriptures prior to him (Acts 3:25-26, 13:46), but instead went first to his own family and pagan kinsmen.

Second, the Shema says Yahweh is God: "Hear O Israel, the LORD [Heb. Yahweh] our God, the LORD [Yahweh] is one." Yahweh is God's own personal self-designation (Exodus 3:14). Not only is this name altogether absent from the Shahada and the Qur'an and never to be found on the recorded lips of Muhammad in the Hadith, the Sirah, or any other Islamic literature, but, and most importantly, the characteristics and character of Yahweh, as seen not only in His words but in His deeds, both in relation to His redeemed people as well as to the rest of His creation, radically differ from the being Muhammad described as God.

Third, the Shema says that Yahweh is one: "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one [Heb. echad]." Unlike the Hebrew word *yachid*, which corresponds to the Islamic notion of an abstract numerical oneness, *tawhid* from the Arabic, the Bible uses the word *echad* for God,³ a word that allows for and which often means unity, such as exists between a husband and wife, constituting them "one flesh", or between morning and evening, constituting them "one day", or such as Christians profess when they say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are "one being", "one essence", or "one God".

Fourth, the Shema says that Yahweh is God: "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God [i.e. Eloheinu], the LORD is one." This word is a combination of *Elohim*, a plural noun for God in Hebrew, and *nu*, a plural pronoun meaning "our", showing once again and definitively that God's oneness does not mean that He is a blank and barren monad, as is the case with Allah;⁴ rather, Yahweh *Elohim* [the LORD God] is a unity of rich diversity, and this diversity is personal in nature.

Fifth and finally, the Shema makes no mention of Muhammad: "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one." Muslims believe, as Yusuf Ali said, that "Belief in the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be on him) is thus an integral part and a logical corollary of belief in Allah."⁵ But as the Shema shows, there is no place for confessing a mere man alongside the one true God in one's ultimate or supreme confession of faith and allegiance. None of the prophets, not even Moses himself, ever subjoined their name to God's Name in such a way. For Muhammad to come along millennia later and introduce such an innovation, one that unduly exalts him to a position assumed by no other prophet, is another clear indication that Muhammad wasn't a true prophet of God and that it wasn't Yahweh who was speaking through an angel to him.

The one exception to the above point, of course, is Jesus (e.g. John 14:1, 17:3), but then Jesus, according to prophetic expectation (Psalm 2, 45, 110; Isaiah 7:14, 9:6; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 12:10; et al.), as well as

His own words (Matthew 11:25ff., 28:18-20 John 5:17-18, 8:58, 10:30, Revelation 1:7-8, 22:12-13) and that of the apostles He appointed to speak and write in His name (Matthew 1:21; John 1:1-14, 20:28; Romans 9:5; Colossians 1:16, 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-10; James 2:1; 2 Peter 1:1), was not and is not merely a man or just another prophet, though He was and is surely both of those, but is also the Father's consubstantial Son or co-eternal Word who became flesh.

Indeed, if Jesus was only a man, like Muhammad, it would have been blasphemous for Him to speak in the way that He did on many occasions. But if Jesus is in fact who He claimed to be, as He certainly is - for so all the prophets, the apostles, Jesus, and even the Father testified (e.g., at Christ's baptism: Matthew 3:16-17, Mark 1:10-11, Luke 3:21-22; the transfiguration: Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35; and in the book of Hebrews: 1:5-13) - then what He said about His divine personhood and Sonship was and is the truth of God, a truth that all men must necessarily confess to be saved and which Old Covenant Jews did confess, at least in a seminal way, when such a confession arose from understanding and faith, when they said: "Hear O Israel, the LORD [Yahweh] our God [Elohim; plural], the LORD [Yahweh] is One [echad; unity]."

This is why Jesus could cite the Shema and immediately go on to declare, from the same Old Testament Scriptures, His universal Lordship, showing that king David in the Psalms called Him Lord and prophesied His reign at the right hand of the Father (Matthew 22:34-46). Similarly, this is why the apostle Paul, in a passage that naturally has the Shema in the background, could declare the Father and the Son as the One God and One Lord from whom and through whom are all things:

"... we know that there is ... no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through Him." (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

Conclusion

All of the above points show that the Shema and the Shahada are not mutually supportive of one another; indeed, they are mutually exclusive, with every word of the Shema pointing away from Mecca. This means that if a person believes what is entailed in the Shahada, then such a person cannot also believe what is entailed in the Biblical Shema. Conversely, a person whose faith is consonant with the Shema cannot also hold to the Shahada.

Unfortunately for Muslims, the Shema does not need the Shahada to hold it up; such a confession stands on its own, as the all too frequent Muslim appeal to it demonstrates. The dilemma for Muslims is that they need to establish just such continuity as the Shema would provide in order to make good their peculiar claims. Islam is a 7th century innovation claiming to be the original faith of mankind; this puts a heavy burden on Muslims and accounts for why they must hanker about to find proof for their assertions, and is also why they will desperately grasp after things like the Shema, even though in its integrity it is fundamentally at odds with the religion brought by their prophet, a religion that fails to recognize God's covenant name (Yahweh), God's uni-plural being (Elohim; echad), and God's exclusively chosen vehicle (Israel) for revealing His saving will to the world.

Footnotes

1 See for example the following brief article by Sami Zaatari, "Is God Triune?"; or the following articles found on various websites: Confessions of Faith, Judaism and Islam: Beyond Tolerance.

2 The Qur'an even agrees with this in places: "O children of Israel! Call to mind the (special) favour which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all others (for my message)" (S. 2:47). "And we gave (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and ordained among his progeny Prophethood and Revelation, and we granted him his reward in this life; and he was in the Hereafter (of the company) of the Righteous" (S. 29:27). "We did aforetime grant to the Children of Israel the Book, the Power of Command, and Prophethood; We gave them, for sustenance, things good and pure; and We favoured them above the nations" (S. 45:16). Still yet, Muhammad in the Qur'an surreptitiously turns around and tries to sneak in through the back door, i.e., through Abraham's son Ishmael, of whom he (falsely) claimed to be a descendant.

3 Ahad is the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew word echad. The Quran uniformly uses the word wahid instead, with Surah 112:1 being the sole exception: "Say, He, Allah, is one of [Ahad(un)]". This latter, since it is out of step with the rest of the Quran, and since it is found in one of the earliest Surahs, is likely due to Muhammad's initial contact with and attempt to appeal to the Jews, a practice he later threw off after being embittered at their near universal rejection of his claims to stand in the prophetic tradition.

4 It is true that Muslims speak of Allah having beautiful names and various attributes, but given their doctrine of oneness, these can only be construed nominalistically.

5 Yusuf Ali, The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an, footnote 779

source: <http://answering-islam.org/authors/rogers/shema.html>

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