

# Kingdom thoughts

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Hebrews 12:28

BMI Devotional June 2014

## Lessons from the alphabet

The first letter in the Hebrew alphabet is **aleph** (א). It is said to be the image of two oxen yoked together.

Interestingly, *aleph* also serves as the numeral one in the Hebrew system for counting. So every time a Hebrew student wrote '1', there was a reminder that 'one' does not stand by itself but is in fact a unity of two! When God declares Himself before Israel saying 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one' (Deut 6:4), the letter *aleph* is used as the first letter in the word 'one' or *aichod* in the Hebrew. This word means 'one' as a compound or group. In English we might say 'The crowd stood as one [aichod]', meaning one crowd but many people.

It is hard not to see the character of God in this simple little letter, because one of the central and most profound doctrines of the Christian faith is that of the Trinity. The God whom we worship is both one and many. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit, He is one, yet three persons in that one? Thus to recognise the eternal nature of this peculiar oneness is to appreciate more deeply what God meant when He said of Adam 'It is not good that man should be alone' (Gen 2:18). Indeed it is to understand more fully what has happened to us at the cross.

The apostle Paul tells us that '...as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous' (Rom 5:19). Adam was one man and yet he was also all men. The whole of humanity became subject to sin and death

because we were all compounded or comprehended in him. In the same way Jesus was one and yet all those who believe are compounded or comprehended in His atoning work at Calvary. The idea of many being comprehended into the one is not a mere image which merely allows Paul to depict the vast and encompassing nature of Christ's death. It is something that flows out of the character of God.

More than this, to recognise the eternal nature of this oneness, it is to understand God's purposes in the cross. Jesus did not die to redeem you and I as loners. Rather He came that we would be one, even as the Godhead is one (John 17:22). Every Christian that has been baptised into Christ's death is not only risen with/in Him in newness of life (Rom 6:4) but has been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). Thus we can say with Wesley, that 'The Bible knows of no such thing as the solitary Christian' or with Luther 'There is no salvation outside the Church'.

The Jews used to speak of *aleph* as being the most humble of letters. Whereas this first letter might have been expected to commence the Bible's first book, Genesis actually commences with Hebrew's second letter *beth* (ב). Interestingly the letter *beth* (and the word *beth*) means household in Hebrew. So we might say that Jesus, He who is the One (Matt 11:3), He who comprehended humanity within Himself, also humbled Himself that He might establish a household of faith (Gal 6:10). So too we His followers must abandon our innate and sinful desire to be 'number one'. We must humble ourselves for the sake of His Kingdom of unity.

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