

“YHWH Our God, YHWH Is *ONE*?”

**Searching for Traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament
And Applying them to Outreach to the Jewish Community**

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Outline

Title: “YHWH Our God, YHWH is ONE?” Searching for Traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament and Applying them to Outreach to the Jewish Community

Intro: It is my belief that there exists within the text of the Old Testament, evident both in the English translations and the Hebrew originals, an abundance of words, phrases, or accounts that, when properly understood and interpreted, show that the writers of the Old Testament, as well as the Patriarchs and the rest of the pre-exile Israelite nation, had some idea of the Trinitarian nature of God: namely, the plurality of His persons and the unity of His substance. [Additionally,] this evidence can be used by Christian evangelists to effectively reach those of the Jewish faith with the Gospel message.

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Conclusion: As seen in the many examples given, the true Triune God can be seen to have revealed Himself already in the Old Testament as being eternally three distinct Persons, yet unquestionably One. Weighing the evidence of words, phrases, and entire accounts found throughout the Old Testament, we can see that, although not stated as fully as in the New Testament, those within the text and those writing the texts were aware enough to recognize a God of three Persons who remained the same One God. Whether the Israelite nation of the Old Testament was Trinitarian in faith remains for a future study to determine; however, we can now see that they had at the least some “suspicion” of complexity within the “oneness” of their God, YHWH ... What remains true, whether in the times of the New Testament or in the Twenty-first century, is that the quickest way to a Jew's heart can be found readily in each and every one of their houses. It is something that they might even know better than you yourself. It is their Bible: what to the Christian is the Old Testament. Judaism has been looking for fulfilment since it was founded as a religion, with the patriarchs of Israel and even Adam himself. What they need to be shown is that Christ Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, is that fulfilment.

Introduction

In this Senior Project, the culmination of my years of study at Concordia University, Ann Arbor, I will draw together all the knowledge and skills that I have learned and developed as a college student to write an academic paper on the topic of my choice: Traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament and Relevant Applications to Outreach to Modern Followers of Judaism. In order to reach this end, I have spent several months reading various theological books and articles, Biblical commentaries, academic books, and primary texts in the Old Testament. In this paper, I will systematically compile the information I have gathered to demonstrate the work I have completed and to supply any of my contemporaries, or other students to come, with a respectable, academic resource that could be used in their own studies of the Trinity or in attempts to share the awesome grace of the Gospel message with those of the Jewish faith.

Thesis

It is my belief that there exists within the text of the Old Testament, evident both in the English translations and the Hebrew originals, an abundance of words, phrases, and accounts that, when properly understood and interpreted, show that the writers of the Old Testament – as well as the Patriarchs and the rest of the pre-exilic Israelite nation – had some idea of the Trinitarian nature of God: namely, the plurality of His persons and the unity of His substance. While this position is held by many within the religious and academic community, there are also many who would strongly disagree. I have attempted to survey the entirety of the spectrum of opinions in this regard in order to present a balanced defense of my own position.

Once I present my argument for a “Trinitarian Old Testament,” I will expound upon the second half of my thesis: this evidence can be used by Christian evangelists to effectively reach those of the Jewish faith with the Gospel message. While this section will be significantly shorter – as the lesser focus of my study – it is no less important, and, hopefully, will be beneficial for bringing the Light of Christ to those who otherwise would be left stranded in the dark.

The Trinity: THAT Important

It would seem off-balanced to begin a detailed search and study of the Trinity in the Old Testament without first establishing the need for such consideration and the importance of such a doctrine as that of the Trinity. The word “trinity,” though absent from the text of the Bible, has certainly played a crucial role in the development of the Christian church from its very beginning, clearly drawing distinction between the God of Christendom and the gods of all other religions.

Being a fundamental doctrine – one from which nearly all others are derived – a proper understanding of the Trinity, as much as is able to be understood, has always held very high value in the Church. This can be seen quite clearly in the development of “creeds”: “short statements, couched in the first person, asserting belief in a select group of facts and doctrines regarded as vitally important.”¹ Countless in number, creeds were – and still are – used by the church as a tool for catechetical instruction and as a formal affirmation of common belief. In fact, it was for these very reasons that creeds were first composed.

Kelly gives further explanation:

¹ Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Creeds*. 3rd Ed. (1972) New York: David McKay Company, Inc. pg. 31.

Prior to the beginning of the fourth century all creeds and summaries of faith were local in character. It was taken for granted, of course, that they enshrined the universally accepted Catholic faith, handed down from the Apostles. But they owed their immediate authority, no less than their individual stamp, to the liturgy of the local church in which they had emerged.²

It was not until the council of Nicea convened that creeds were composed for the explicit purpose of universal authority and as “tests of the orthodoxy of Christians in general,”³ the Nicene Creed, obviously, being the first. The Athanasian Creed, one of kind with the Nicene (although giving serious challenge to the definition of a creed as “short statements”), contains particular focus on the Trinity, and as such will be the focus of my study for a short while.

The first witness of the Athanasian Creed that can be positively identified comes from “Caesarius, the outstanding preacher and pastor who was primate of Arles from 502 ... to 542.”⁴ As opposed to being used as a piece of the liturgy, this particular creed was used from the beginning to summarize orthodox teaching and to test for orthodoxy among the clergy. “Because of its meticulous construction and theological precision this creed has been called ‘the flower of the whole credal literature.’”⁵ It is for this exact theological precision that it has been greatly esteemed in the history of the church; and, although it has fallen out of use in much of the Church, it still holds its high position next to the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds in such theological books as the *Book of Concord*, the great statement of Lutheran orthodoxy.

It is not, however, the storied history of the Athanasian Creed which brings it forward in our consideration at this point, but it is the creed’s surprisingly strong

² Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*. pg. 205

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kelly, J.N.D. *The Athanasian Creed*. (1964) New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. pg. 35

⁵ Ibid. pg. 39

statements concerning the necessity of proper understanding of the Trinity that set it apart from the others. The creed opens with this declaration: “Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold the Catholic faith.”⁶ This “Catholic faith” is then defined as such: “Now this is the Catholic faith, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity...”⁷ By simple logic, it seems quite clear that the doctrine of the mysterious Trinity is absolutely crucial for those who would be saved.

In addition to its importance in the realm of salvation, the doctrine of the Trinity, properly understood, also serves as a necessary tool in proper interpretation of the New Testament: without knowledge of God as three distinct persons of yet one indivisible substance, the events of Jesus’ baptism or even His self-sacrifice on the cross would lose their value and meaning in the mind of the reader. I would argue that this axiom also holds true for the Old Testament: without proper understanding of the Trinity, the Old Testament seems nonsensical and full of grammatical folly.

Human Knowledge of God

With the importance of proper understanding of the Trinity now expounded, I can now begin to move into the meat of this study: piecing together the traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament. However, prior to a detailed discussion of the manner in which God is named and described in the Old Testament Scriptures, some supporting information is needed first: how it is that human beings gain knowledge of God and how much of the mystery of God they can know.

Human beings, as the apex of creation, have the awesome gift of being able to know their Creator, both in a personal and impersonal fashion, through two means of

⁶ Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed*. pg. 17

⁷ Ibid.

revelation: direct and indirect. God's indirect revelation of Himself and His nature can be seen in the work of His creation: the awesome majesty of the mountains, the sweeping power of the ocean waves, the terrible strength of summer thunder, the sweet relief of warm rain, the intricacy of the cycles of life, the detailed construction of the human eye, and the list could truly continue forever. Yet, in His great love and mercy, God has not limited himself to this impersonal, indirect revelation alone, but He has also spoken to man – some “face to face” (as we will discuss later), some through messengers, and still others through His inspired Scriptures. It is in this last method of communication that God has revealed the mystery of His nature, inasmuch as we are able to understand. It is in the Bible that we learn of His Trinity.

To make it clear from the start, let it be said that our knowledge of God is, by nature, incomplete. As finite, mortal, material beings we simply cannot comprehend the infinite, immortal, and spiritual in their fullness of mystery. This concept is spoken clearly by Robert Morey: “The Trinitarian begins with the *a priori*⁸ assumption that the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will be incomprehensible because God is essentially incomprehensible in His nature ... any god we could fully understand and explain would be *less* than what we are.”⁹

Yet, as has been evidenced by all men of all time, another part of the human nature is a desire to reach or understand that which is beyond him, namely God. Although some claim that they do not believe in the supernatural or the spiritual, denying even the existence of God, they betray themselves by their very statement of disbelief, for in so stating, they show their own religious belief. Everyone approaches everything – whether

⁸ *a priori* – that knowledge that comes apart from or before sense experience

⁹ Morey, Robert. *The Trinity: Evidences and Issues*. (1996) Grand Rapids, MI: Word Publishing. pg. 73

considering the spiritual or choosing a burger – with *a priori* assumptions; the only difference between the conservative Christian and the liberal or cultist is the nature of their assumptions – whether they are Biblically based or not.¹⁰

A Trinitarian Old Testament?

It is with that knowledge that we turn to the Old Testament to seek to understand how and what of Himself God has revealed to us. In my study of this topic, it never failed that, prior to engaging the subject, each author proposed his own “disclaimer” regarding the ensuing information. These ranged from:

Exegetes and theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity...Although the Hebrew Bible depicts God as the father of Israel and employs personifications of God such as Word (davar), Spirit (ruah)...it would go beyond the intention and spirit of the Old Testament to correlate these notions with later trinitarian doctrine. Furthermore, exegetes and theologians agree that the New Testament does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity.¹¹

to the most common middle ground:

Yet there are traces of the triune God throughout the Old Testament. Standing alone, these traces could never be understood as references to Persons in the Trinity. Only with the New Testament revelation is new light cast on the meaning of many Old Testament passages.¹²

to an opinion much closer to my own:

Luther’s position may be summarized as follows: Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not revealed as clearly in the Old as in the New Testament, nevertheless this doctrine is unmistakably set forth in the Old Testament...[Quoting Luther] ‘Thus at the very beginning of the world the doctrine of the three persons in the Godhead was indicated, later clearly understood by the Prophets, and finally fully revealed in the Gospel’ (St. L. I:274) ... The Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth

¹⁰ Morey, pg. 74

¹¹ LaCugna, Catherine M. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 15. (1987) New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. pg. 54.

¹² Woods, Constance. “The Holy Trinity in the Old Testament – Part 1” [The Catholic Faith](http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Faith/1998-01-02/toc.html). January/February 1998 [magazine online]. Available from <http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Faith/1998-01-02/toc.html> Internet. Accessed 14 May 2002. pg. 1

centuries are agreed that the doctrine of the Trinity is revealed to such an extent in the Old Testament that the believers were able to perceive and believe the doctrine of the Trinity.¹³

I was a bit surprised to read the last quote: I had approached this study with the hope that I might be able to prove that the traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament did not limit the patriarchal fathers to “traces” of knowledge of the Trinity but that they were as staunchly Trinitarian as Luther or I myself claim to be! However, I quickly learned that it would be an enormous task to prove my hypothesis that would take a project of much larger scope than this. As such, I will save that thought for a future study so that I may focus here on showing the first step: that the Patriarchs and the Old Testament believers had “tantalizing traces” of Trinitarian understanding.

One God

Differences in interpretation aside, there is one declaration within Scripture that resounds in the ear of Christian and Jew – Trinitarian and Unitarian – alike: There is only *ONE* God. “Holy Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, teaches that God is *one* (monotheism) ... The entire Scriptures may fittingly be called a mighty protest against polytheism.”¹⁴ That there is only one God “is the great foundation truth of the Bible from the very first verse in it ... to the close of the last book in it.”¹⁵ Being surrounded on every side by aggressively polytheistic enemies always seeking to sow seeds of dissent and disbelief among the Israelite nation, it is no wonder that their holy writings, the Scriptures, were so adamantly monotheistic – rigorously monotheistic to the clear point of being hostile to any sort of polytheism. Not only did the authors of the Bible recognize false gods as material idols, but they also saw the demonic forces behind

¹³ Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*. (1950) St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. pg. 393-4

¹⁴ Pieper, pg. 381

¹⁵ Torrey, R. A. *The God of the Bible*. (1923) New York: George H. Doran Company. pg. 56

them. “They believed that there was only one true God and that all other religions and their gods were not only demonic, but *stupid and foolish*.”¹⁶

Despite the clarity of their own Scriptures, the faith of the Israelite nation was without question one of surprise and constant flux. Despite the obviousness of their monotheistic beliefs and the clear proximity of their God, they often turned away towards the attractions of their pagan neighbors, worshipping idols and disregarding the commands of their God. It is for this reason that Bernard Piault – one whose opinion of the nature of the traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament is quite different from my own – was led to conclude:

Only gradually has God revealed the mystery of his own being...God first established monotheism on firm foundations, as the basic dogma that bound Israel to the one God, Yahweh...To have revealed the mystery of the Trinity at that time would have been to threaten the purity of Israel’s religion: the *Jews would certainly have come to worship three gods* [italics mine] ... It is possible to see how, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who inspired the leading religious figures of Israel, ideas developed which would one day enable those who belonged to the ‘true Israel’ to receive with ready and eager hearts the message that Jesus brought concerning the Three-in-One.¹⁷

While it is true that the Israelite nation seemed to constantly vex the mind and test the patience of their God, I find it hard to believe and accept that God has limited Himself – in spite of all of His omnipotence and omniscience – by what corrupt and misleading cults and false religions might surround His chosen people. It certainly is clear that the nature of false religions has shifted over time: instead of sacrificing children to idols of wood and stone, men are consumed with their jobs, their money, and their passions. Are we then to assume that any revelation God has for us today would shy away from dealing with work, money, sex, sports, or alcohol?

¹⁶ Morey, pg. 68

¹⁷ Piault, Bernard. *What Is The Trinity?* (1959) New York: Hawthorn Books Publishers. pp. 15-16

The only other explanation for Piault’s position would seem to be that he assumed the people of old to be less intellectually capable or of weaker will – a position I think to be extremely prideful and bigoted. No, I would say that, without doubt, the almighty, all-knowing Creator God, if He willed to share the mystery of His nature with His creation, could do so successfully.

How Then Can *One Be More Than One*?

A Trinitarian would not find a problem with the Biblical witness to the “Oneness” of God: it is to the *nature* of that “Oneness” that he would call attention. Such is the position of Gleason L. Archer: “That God is One is asserted in both the Old and New Testaments: Deuteronomy 6:4...Mark 12:29...On the other Hand, the Bible teaches that God is not a sterile monad but eternally exists in three persons.”¹⁸ It will be my goal to draw forth the evidence to which Archer’s claim alludes, as would be supported by R. A. Torrey: “We shall see directly by the teachings of the whole Bible, by the teachings of the Old Testament as clearly as by the teachings of the New Testament, that there are three Divine Persons in the One Godhead.”¹⁹

The Traces of the Trinity In The Old Testament

Of all the evidence that I found that supported my thesis, there was one little tidbit that I found interesting, albeit more humorous than conclusive. When examining the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, one can see that the first verse of the entire Bible, Genesis 1:1 begins with the word בְּרֵאשִׁית (*bray’shith*), meaning “In the beginning.” Typically, this word is not a highly valued “weapon” in the “arsenal” of “Joe Trinitarian,”

¹⁸ Archer, Gleason L. *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. (1982) Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. pg. 357

¹⁹ Torrey, pg. 62

out to convince the world of God's triune nature, but R. A. Torrey brought to my attention that the first three letters contain the first witness to the Trinity in the Old Testament. The first, ב (equivalent to "B"), is also the first letter in the Hebrew word for "Son" - בן (*bane*). The second letter, ר ("R"), is the first letter in the Hebrew word for "Spirit" – רוּחַ (*ruach*). Finally, the third letter, א ("A"), is the first letter in the Hebrew word for "Father" – אב (*ab*).²⁰ While my intent as a scholar is not to play word and letter games, I do believe that God is providentially active in all the world, *especially* His inspired Word. Does this little anagram prove anything? No. But it could certainly be used as a lighthearted conversation starter with someone.²¹ It is in the rest of the examples, however, that the real power of the argument finds itself – especially this next example.

Deuteronomy 6:4 – God's "Oneness" found in אֶחָד?

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד
 "Hear, O Israel, YHWH our God, YHWH is one"

“There are nine different Hebrew words which at times are translated as the word ‘one:’ אֶחָד אֶחָד אֶחָד אֶחָד אֶחָד אֶחָד אֶחָד אֶחָד אֶחָד (Chal).”²² However, of that list, only *one* of the words could indicate “solitary oneness” [a concept that, if applied to God, would conflict with Trinitarian beliefs] - יָחִיד (*yachid*). If this word were to have been used in Deuteronomy 6:4, it would have been very damaging to the

²⁰ Torrey, pg. 65

²¹ For the record, I also looked at the first three letters of the Greek New Testament: β, ι, and β from Βίβλος, translated “book” – the closest thing that I could find to compare was βρυχε ἰχθύς Βόος: roughly translated, “Repeatedly grind a fish, Boaz.” I failed to find any real connection.

²² Morey, pg. 87

argument of the Trinitarians. In fact, if it were anywhere applied to God, it would present a serious problem. However, אֱלֹהִים is never applied to God!²³

The word used in the Hebrew text for “one” – אֶחָד (*'echad*) – is a word used in several other places to indicate “compound oneness”: Genesis 2:24 [two people, when married, become *one* flesh], Genesis 11:6 [collective unity – *one* people], and II Chronicles 30:12 [“God gave the people ‘one heart’”]. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren would likely object to such a claim, however: “In the Hebrew OT, *'echadh* [אֶחָד] had not yet come to be used in a theological program. Therefore, we cannot deal with *monotheism* in this article.”²⁴ It is their belief that in this verse, אֱלֹהִים is used to indicate that Yahweh is the only God for Israel – making no statement to deny the existence of other gods.

Paul E. Kretzmann, though making no conclusion regarding the Trinity, would disagree with the previous scholars' point: "V. 4. 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord, our God, is one Lord,' Jehovah the one. The Lord of Israel is the absolute God, and there is none other."²⁵ It seems that he sees a theological point is being made here about the nature of God, moreso than simply His relationship to Israel. Perhaps then, there is room for the possibility that, within this verse, God has also chosen to reveal part of the mystery of His nature.

Let us look again at the use of the word אֱלֹהִים throughout the Old Testament: “... beyond all doubt ... the Old Testament, from the Law to the Prophets, used אֱלֹהִים to

²³ Morey. pg. 88

²⁴ Botterweck, G. Johannes and Ringren, Helmer (Eds.) *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. 1. (1974) Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. pg. 194.

²⁵ Kretzmann, Paul. *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament Vol. 1 – The Historical Books of the Old Testament: Genesis to Esther*. (1923) St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. pg. 314

express a unified or compound oneness.”²⁶ Torrey comes to a very similar conclusion:

“The Hebrew word translated ‘one’ ... denotes a compound unity and not a simple unity.”²⁷ Morey continues:

If the writers of Scripture believed that God was multi-personal, then we would expect to find that they would apply \aleph to God because this would mean that God is ‘one’ in a composite or compound sense. As a matter of fact, \aleph is the *only* available Hebrew word they could use to express this idea.²⁸

It seems logical that, if the word \aleph can, and *only* can, carry the meaning of “compound oneness,” then its use in Deuteronomy 6:4 could certainly carry that connotation. Though the context of the verse clearly shows that the word is not being used to reveal the nature of God to His people, it *does* show that God is identifying Himself as the one whom the Israelites should love. As such, “compound oneness” is not precluded as a possible meaning, for is not the nature of a person inherent in who that person is? And if God is here identifying Himself to His people, could He not then also be revealing some of the mystery of His Nature. Certainly the writers of the text were aware of their word choice and the connotations that they were introducing into the text. It would seem logical then that they were aware to some degree of a “compound oneness” within God to have described Him so.

Can Plural Words Indicate Plural Persons?

Moving into a broader base of evidence, let us examine the titles and names given God throughout Scripture to see if they can shed light on our topic. Anyone who believed that the God of Scripture was of solitary oneness would expect titles and names give to

²⁶ Morey, pg. 89

²⁷ Torrey, pg. 62

²⁸ Morey, pg. 89

this God to be singular, as would those who understood His oneness to be compound. Without question, singular names are given Him: אֱלֹ (‘*el*) [singular noun: God], בּוֹרֵא (‘*borae*’) [singular participle from בָּרָא (‘*bara*’): Maker], וְיֹצֵרֹ (‘*veyotzroe*) [singular participle from יָצַר (‘*yatzar*’): Shaper].²⁹ However, *only* the Trinitarian would expect to find plural names and titles given to God – and, as we shall see, they certainly do exist!

The most obvious and common word used in relation to God that is plural in form but translated in the singular is אֱלֹהִים (‘*elohim*), the word "God"! This word is most often explained to be the plural form of אֱלֹ (‘*el*) – an example just used in the singular category. Their relationship seems to be quite clear and simple at first glance: םִ (‘*im*) is the common plural termination for a Hebrew noun. Some scholars, such as Botterweck and Ringgren, do not think this explanation is quite so simple.

It is usually assumed that ‘*el* [אֱלֹ] and ‘*elohim* [אֱלֹהִים] are related, viz., ‘*elohim* [אֱלֹהִים] would be a plural form of ‘*el* [אֱלֹ] expanded with the *he* [ה]. This sort of expansion also occurs elsewhere in Hebrew and Aramaic. Then ‘*eloah* [אֱלֹהַ] – a third word translated as “God” would be a late singular form derived from ‘*elohim* [אֱלֹהִים]. However, this hypothesis is not completely without difficulties...³⁰

However difficult their linguistic relationship is to map out, that they are related Hebrew nouns is not questioned.

So, then, this question remains: why is it that, of the three forms of the Hebrew word for "God," the one most commonly used is in a plural form if, as some would claim, the God of the Old Testament has no room for plurality of persons? "Why is it that the

²⁹ Morey. pg. 91

³⁰ Botterweck & Ringgren, pg. 273

Jews with their intense monotheism had a plural name for God?"³¹ The most commonly used explanation is that this form is the "pluralis majestatis" – the "plural of majesty." It was common for the kings and queens of the world from the Middle Ages and on to refer to themselves, or to be referred to by others, with plural words and pronouns. An example: King X of country Y would address his subjects: "We [referring only to himself] announce to you a great plan for a pig wrestling party. We [again referring to himself] are happy when you are happy, and this will certainly make you happy." In this case, King X referred to himself with "We" because he understood himself to have been given his authority by God, and to be the visible representation of God's authority to the people as well as the representation of himself. Hence, the plurality of representations warrants a plural word. However, the explanation of the plural references to God in the Old Testament as "Plurals of Majesty" is actually an "Amazing Hoax:"

... popularized by the famous Jewish scholar Gesenius ... the fundamental error resided in the attempt to take a modern monarchical idiosyncrasy and read it back into an ancient text when such an idiosyncrasy was unknown at that time...they seem to be totally ignorant of the fact that it is a recent grammatical invention and, thus, cannot be read back into ancient times or texts.³²

Morey is not alone in his opinion regarding this explanation; Torrey comes to the same conclusion:

The best answer that they [Old Hebrew lexicographers and grammarians] could give was that the plural form used for the name (or title) of God was the 'pluralis majestatis,' that is the plural of majesty...to say nothing of the fact that it is not at all certain that the 'pluralis majestatis' is ever found in the Old Testament, there is an explanation much nearer at hand and much simpler, and that is, that *a plural name was used for the one God, in spite of the intense monotheism of the Jews, because there is a plurality of person in the one Godhead.*³³

³¹ Torrey, pg. 64

³² Morey, pg. 95

³³ Torrey, pg. 64

The scholar Piault would object, claiming: "...there is no way in which it [the use of the plural, אֱלֹהִים] can be made to disclose a revelation of the Trinity, however veiled."³⁴

However, it seems to me that Piault and the other scholars who support the argument for the "plural of majesty" most often approach the text with the presupposition that God is an absolute monad – of a "oneness" without room for complexity. It would rather seem to be the case that if one were to approach the textual evidences with an open mind that such examples could certainly raise the question: "...is this merely a grammatical peculiarity or a cryptic reference to the Trinity to be fully revealed in the New Testament?"³⁵ With the *a priori* opinion that God is *not* a triunity aside, the Trinitarian explanation is much more academically sound than that of the "Plural of Majesty."

Is אֱלֹהִים the Only Evidence?

Certainly Not! If that were the only evidence in this case, my grounds would be very weak! To begin, "The second most popular name for God in the Old Testament is אֲדֹנָי (Adonai, i.e., 'Lord') ... a plural noun."³⁶ So that makes the two most commonly used names for God in the Old Testament plural in form. In addition to those two, there are many references to God, within the poetical sections especially, that are figurative descriptors in the plural. Earlier, בֹרֵא (borae') was given as an example of a singular word meaning "Maker;" there is another word used to describe God that is also translated "Maker," although in this case, it is plural: בְּעֹשֵׂי (be'osai) [masculine plural participle from עָשָׂה ('asah)].

³⁴ Piault, pg. 25

³⁵ Woods, pg. 2

³⁶ Morey, pg 92

Can Plural Pronouns Indicate Plural Persons?

In addition to the plural names and titles given in reference to God, there is another field of evidence that certainly should be examined: plural pronouns used in reference to God *by God Himself*. The classic example of this is found in Genesis 1:26.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ

“And God said let Us make man in Our own image, according to Our form”³⁷

As a very well known verse in scholastic circles, this has received much attention and comment. Morey comments: “The Hebrew grammar cannot be ignored. The main verb as well as the pronouns are *all* plural. This would indicate that God is the ‘Us’ and ‘Our’ who is speaking.”³⁸ Francis Pieper identifies this verse in his list of Old Testament passages that refer to the Trinity. In this, he echoes Martin Luther:

In the second place, the word ‘Let Us Make’ is aimed at making sure the mystery of our faith, by which we believe that from eternity there is one God and there are three separate Persons in one God head: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.³⁹

This evidence seems to me to be much more difficult to explain away; however, again skeptical scholars who deny the Trinitarian evidence in the Old Testament refer again to the “Plural of Majesty” for this case. One example of this is Bernard Piault: “For the same reason it cannot be admitted that Genesis 1. 26, in which God-Elohim says: ‘Let us make man’, suggests a joint decision of the three divine Persons.”⁴⁰ Robert Morey gives a very convincing argument against the “Plural of Majesty” again: This cannot be a

³⁷ This is my own translation, using William L. Holladay *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (1988) Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

³⁸ Morey, pg. 94

³⁹ Martin Luther *Luther's Works: Vol. 1 – Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*. (Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. 1958) St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. pg. 57

⁴⁰ Piault, pg. 25

“plural of majesty,” because, according to Rabbi Tzvi Nassi (a lecturer in Hebrew at Oxford University), such a linguistic construction did not exist at that point:

Such a *pluralis excellentiae* was, however, a thing unknown to Moses and the prophets. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, David, and all the other kings, throughout תּוֹרָה (the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa) speak in the singular, and not as modern kings in the plural. They do not say *we*, but *I*, command.⁴¹

I can see how a scholar who, based on the *a priori* assumption that the Trinity either does not exist or certainly was not revealed in the Old Testament, would find difficulty explaining this powerful verse – they have quite an argument to make! I would agree with Constance Woods: “Since it is a grammatical plural [the pronouns], we have to allow for the possibility that other persons are being addressed ... God is conversing with a rational being or beings who are numerically distinct from him.”⁴²

Since the words here for image – צֶלֶם (*tzelem*) – and form – דְמוּת (*demuth*) – are singular nouns with plural possessive pronouns attached – אֱנִי. (-*aenue*), they cannot refer to more than one image or one form. If God were speaking with anyone but Himself in His triunity, this would not make any grammatical sense: man is created in the one image and one form of God not in the images and forms of God and angels or some other rational being. Gleason Archer gave excellent comment on this issue:

This first person plural can hardly be a mere editorial or royal plural that refers to the speaker alone, for no such usage is demonstrable anywhere else in biblical Hebrew...God – the same God who spoke of Himself in the plural – now states that He created man in His image. In other words, the plural equals the singular. *This can only be understood in terms of the Trinitarian nature of God* [italics mine].⁴³

⁴¹ Morey, pg. 95

⁴² Woods, pg. 1

⁴³ Archer, pg. 359

Interaction of Discernable Persons within the Godhead

Alongside the evidences of plural names, titles, and pronouns used in reference to God, there also can be found accounts of God's actions wherein more than one discernable Person is involved in the activity. These actions done by the Persons of the Trinity range from destruction of entire cities to deliverance to everything in between. To begin, let us examine the account of the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24.

וַיְהִי הַמָּטִיט וְעַל־סֹדֹם וְעַל־עֲמֹרָה גִפְרִית וְאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם

"And YHWH made to rain down upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah sulphur and fire from YHWH out of the heavens."⁴⁴

This account gives clear indication of two actors with the Divine Name "YHWH": One down on earth and One in the heavens. Prior to this verse, the context has the YHWH now on the ground speaking with Abraham (an account to be discussed later in this paper). After their discussion, the YHWH on the ground moves to Sodom and Gomorrah to deliver His righteous judgment. Up to this point, there was reference to only one YHWH. Then the text introduces the second YHWH – the one in the heavens.

Explanations of this verse have been many from evidence of a Triune God to a repetition for emphasis. Of the latter, Morey comments: "There are no other passages in the Pentateuch where a name is repeated once at the beginning and again at the end for emphasis sake. Thus there is no evidence that Moses ever used such a literary device."⁴⁵ He also explained Martin Luther's interpretation: "This mode of speaking greatly irks the Jews and they try in vain to explain it. But Moses mentions Jehovah twice to show that

⁴⁴ This is my own translation, using Holladay.

⁴⁵ Morey, pg. 97

there is but one God, but that in this one God there are three distinct persons.”⁴⁶ It is with Luther and Morey that I agree.

Another example can be found in Psalm 45:6-7:

כְּסֵאֶךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד
v. 6 “Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever ...”
עַל־כֵּן מָשַׁחְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ
v. 7 “Therefore God, your God, anointed You...”

In these verses, God is identified by name and by attribute: being eternal. After an interval containing more divine attributes, the same individual is said to be anointed by His God. This is no ordinary anointing but an “anointing of joy” – an action and gift only able to be given by the true God. Therefore, one already identified as God is said to have a God – identified as such by His action of anointing – resulting in the simultaneous existence of more than one “God.”

An example that very clearly shows the Trinity in action – with proper interpretation – is found in Isaiah 48: 12b, 16b:

אֲנִי־הוּא אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן אֶף אֲנִי אַחֲרֹן
v. 12b “I am He, I am the first, I am also the last ...”
וַעֲתָה אֶדְבָּרְךָ יְהוָה שְׁלַחֲנִי וְרוּחִי
v. 16b “And now the Lord YHWH has sent Me and His Spirit...”

In this selection, God is speaking to His people, beginning by indentifying Himself quite clearly as the Eternal God. In the sections not quoted, He also identifies Himself as the Creator God and the Redeemer. Having identified Himself so, He proceeds to declare that He has been sent by God along with God's Spirit. “If the passage is interpreted in its natural and normal meaning, there are three persons in this passage who are all God!”⁴⁷

My final example in this category can be found in Hosea 1:7

⁴⁶ Morey, pg. 97

⁴⁷ Ibid. pg. 101

וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּים בַּיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם
“I will save them by YHWH their God”

The context of this verse is that YHWH was speaking to Hosea, giving him the name for his first daughter, Lo-Ruhamah. God gave her the name, meaning “not loved,” because He will no longer love Israel, but in the verse quoted, He assures Hosea that His love and deliverance will continue for Judah. The first word, a verb with subject and object included, is the Hiphil form of *יָשַׁע* (*yasha'*) – the word for “save” – in the first person, singular, masculine. It also contains a third person plural pronominal suffix, referring to Judah. The most interesting part of this account is that the speaker, already identified as YHWH, declares that Judah will be saved by a second YHWH – their God!

If *I* as the first person promise to do something for *you* as the second person through a *third* person, am I not implying that I am *not* the same as the third person? If grammar means anything, the answer is, ‘Yes’.⁴⁸

By the simple laws of grammar, this verse can only be interpreted to reveal more than one Person within the Godhead.

Theophanies: the appearance of God in human form

Having examined the evidence of select words, names, and accounts throughout the Old Testament that have proven to give evidence to a Trinitarian understanding – however veiled it might seem – in the mind of the writers, let us now move into another field of evidence: namely, that of the "Theophany".

The word ‘theophany’ comes from two Greek words – *θεός* and *φαίνω* which simply mean *the appearance of God in human form*. These appearances were brief periods of time during which the one true God came to earth in the form of a man...God was literally manifested in the flesh and dwelt among us. The Invisible became Visible and the Immaterial became Material without ceasing at any time to be true deity.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Morey, pg 102

⁴⁹ Ibid. pg. 106

There is an English connotation to the word "appear" that means "seeming to be although it is possible that it is not or truly is not." This is not the case in Hebrew. The Hebrew verb רָאָה (*ra'ah*) means, specifically, seeing with the eye of man. Therefore, when the Hebrew text states that God appeared to man, using the word רָאָה (*ra'ah*), it can only mean that He appeared in a visible, physical form.

Since God is, by nature, spirit, He does not have physical form as any part of His natural essence. Therefore, those instances in the Old Testament wherein He is described as speaking "mouth to mouth" or appearing "face to face," sitting and conversing with a human, or behaving like a human would in His place are viable evidence for His assuming human form for a short time to accomplish His purpose.

Our first example can be found in Genesis 3:8:

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מְתַהַלֵּךְ בְּגֶן

"And they heard the voice of the YHWH God as He was walking in the garden"⁵⁰

In this text, the participle מְתַהַלֵּךְ (*mithhallaek*) "indicates a regular habit of walking around the garden."⁵¹ As the context tells us, Adam and Eve, after hearing YHWH God's voice, hid behind a tree: "A physical hiding presupposes a physical form of God."⁵² If you were able to discern the presence of an invisible demon, would it do you any good to hide behind your couch? No! In order to hide from something, you must know where that thing is as you hide – if it were unable to be seen, you simply could not hide from it! In the same way, the only sense that can be ascribed to Adam and Eve's actions demands that they be hiding from a very *visible* LORD God.

⁵⁰ This is my translation.

⁵¹ Morey, pg 111

⁵² Ibid.

Elsewhere in the early chapters of Genesis, we learn that Adam and Eve regularly walked and talked with God. In fact, it was likely at their usual “meeting time” that this account took place. What is interesting is that it was normal for these creatures to converse with their Creator. Whenever conversation with God is mentioned in the Bible, the dialogue and behavior of both parties involved is natural – indicating that such occasions were fairly common, at least common enough not to “scare the people to death.”

Let us give further thought to some of these unique conversations. A good starting point is Numbers 12:6-8 in which God declares that He speaks to Moses differently than He does with other prophets, namely, “face to face” and not in a vision or dream.

פֶּה אֶל־פֶּה אֲדַבֵּר־בּוֹ וּמֵרְאָה וְלֹא בַחֲדָת וְתִמְנַת יְהוָה יִבִּישׁ
“Mouth to mouth, I speak to him and showing and not in riddles
and of the form of YHWH he will catch sight”⁵³

With strong emphasis, YHWH declares His manner of speaking with His servant Moses: mouth to mouth, in a clear fashion, not in riddles, and in such a manner that Moses perceives His form! In at least one other instance, similar comment is made – Exodus 33:11:

וַדַּבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ
“And YHWH spoke to Moses face to face like a man will speak to his companion”⁵⁴

Quite clearly, this verse explains the "companion"-like nature of God's conversations with Moses. Some attempt to explain these passages as figures of speech used to emphasize the closeness and clarity of God's messages to Moses; however, there is no evidence to suggest that these are anything but literal in their meaning.

⁵³ This is my translation, using Holladay.

⁵⁴ This is my translation, using Holladay.

Many of the early church fathers took the opportunity to discuss the topic of theophanies in the Old Testament, especially in reference to Exodus 33:18-23. In this passage, Moses [who, eight verses previous, was said to have spoken with God face to face] requests to see God's glory, to which YHWH replies in verse 20: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי נֹא אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ

v. 18 "And he [Moses] said 'Please let me see Your glory'"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעְבִּיר כָּל־טוֹבִי עַל־פָּנֶיךָ

v. 19 a "And He [God] said, 'I will make all of My Goodness to cross over your face'"

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־פָּנַי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאוּ אֱנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי

v. 20 "And he [God] said 'You will not be able to see My face for man is not able to see Me and live'"⁵⁵

This last verse, especially, raises some questions: how is it that, at one point in an account, God could say that Moses speaks to Him face to face and then say that no man can see His face? In fact that is the very question that vexed Tertullian's mind.

There are two uses of the word face, one in the sense of the face which no one can see and live, and one in the sense of the way in which God converses with Moses as a friend. Tertullian concludes that the face which Moses conversed with was the Son ... Or perhaps Moses did see the Lord face to face, just as Abraham did, in the form of a man. In that case Moses would be seeing a representation of God, but not His divinity or His glory. For the "glory" of God that Moses asks to see is the sense of God's "face" that no one can see and live.⁵⁶

Perhaps another account might shed light on this apparent confusion, for Scripture does interpret Scripture. Let us then move for a while to Genesis 18 – the account of Abraham's three mysterious visitors under the terebinth (oak) trees of Memre. In this account, three visitors – unknown to Abraham – appear beside him. Upon seeing them,

⁵⁵ This is my translation, using Holladay.

⁵⁶ Constance Woods. "The Holy Trinity in the Old Testament – Part 2". *The Catholic Faith*. March/April 1998 [magazine online]. Available from <http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Faith/1998-03-04/toc.html> Internet. Accessed 14 May 2002. pg. 1

Abraham jumps to his feet and prepares for them a meal. Constance Woods summarizes and interprets the next section very well:

They (plural) ask where his wife Sarah is, then one (singular) informs Abraham that he will return “when life would be due,” at which time Sarah will have a son ... At this point the one who had spoken is identified openly as Yahweh, reflecting Abraham’s dawning awareness of the visitor’s identity ... Abraham’s alternation between the singular and the plural forms of address indicates that the mysterious visitor is in some way both three and one.⁵⁷

After the meal, YHWH speaks, apparently two the two others with Him, of His plans to bring His judgment upon the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. At this point, the two other "men" departed, leaving YHWH with Abraham, who proceeds to plead for the lives of those in the cities who might be righteous. After they are finished speaking, the account turns back to the two "men" who had left already – now identified as angels. When they had removed the family of Lot from the cities, YHWH, who apparently had come to the place, brought down sulphur and fire from heaven.⁵⁸

What is of great interest in this section of Genesis is the interaction between Abraham and the three visitors. At points, the three visitors had spoken as a unified whole and, at other times, as individuals. Later, two of the three were clearly identified as angels, while the third visitor was revealed to be YHWH. All the while, Abraham gave them each great reverence, especially the one identified as YHWH. But at the same time, YHWH also gave great privilege and respect to Abraham, allowing him to plead for the righteous men of Sodom and Gomorrah. There was a distinct vascillation between the three visitors as a unified whole and as individuals, made even more interesting by

⁵⁷ Woods, “Part 1” pg 7

⁵⁸ This particular verse was discussed above.

Abraham's apparent lack of surprise at their identities. The ambiguity suggests that some mystery lies below the obviousness of what is written.

The Angel of YHWH as the Second Person of the Trinity

It remains an open question as to how it is that Moses could have conversed with God "face to face" and yet not have been allowed to see His face. The account of Abraham and the three visitors, one of whom is YHWH, again shows a situation which a human is allowed to physically see and speak with YHWH – for the three visitors sat under a physical tree, had their feet washed with physical water, and ate physical food.⁵⁹ However, that does not explain the apparent disparity in Exodus 33. Yet it is this same mystery that draw us to the next section of our study: the nature of the Angel of YHWH and the possibility that He is the Second Person of the Trinity – *and* that it was He who appeared to Abraham and Moses. In fact, Francis Pieper would surely consider this paper to be downright wanting if we were not to consider such a topic:

A treatise on the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament is incomplete without a discussion of those passages from Genesis (22:11f.) to Malachi (3:1) in which divine names and attributes are ascribed to the Angel of the Lord: מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה.⁶⁰

To do so effectively, let us begin by examining a word much confused and misrepresented by the church and world alike: angel. The confusion regarding this particular theophany was the result of the paucity of the use of the word “angel” – in Hebrew, מַלְאָךְ (*mal'ak*) means “messenger,” as does ἄγγελος (*angelos*) in Greek – however, in the Latin translations (and again in English), those words were transliterated into *angelus* (*angel* in English) instead of being translated correctly! It is true that angels

⁵⁹ Genesis 18:4-8

⁶⁰ Pieper, pp. 395-6

are spiritual beings of great strength and ability, however, every time מַלְאָךְ or ἄγγελος are used in the Scriptures, the reference does not explicitly go to a member of the created beings also known as angels, but first should be considered “messengers.”

It is with this understanding that we can begin to see that in many of the cases in the Old Testament where the phrase מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה (*mal'ak YHWH*) “Angel of YHWH” is used, there is room to interpret it, not as a created spiritual being, but as the Second Person of the Trinity. One such example can be found in Genesis 16:7-14. In this account, the Angel of YHWH speaks to Hagar, maidservant of Sarah, telling her that she is pregnant and what to name her son.

Hagar leaves no doubt as to the identity of the Messenger who is talking with her. In verse 13, Hagar calls upon the name of Yahweh...The word is וַתִּקְרָא [(*vatikra*')] a waw consecutive imperfect and means that she blurted out the Divine name. The only reason why Moses identified the Yahweh whose name she blurted out as the ‘One who was talking to her’ was to distinguish Him from the other Yahweh mentioned in verse 11.⁶¹

A second example is Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:9-14.

Verse 11 reads:

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם
"And the Angel of YHWH called out to him [Abraham] out of the heavens
and He said, 'Abraham, Abraham!'"⁶²

“The failure to translate הַשָּׁמַיִם (*hashamayim*) accurately has led to the idea that an invisible voice rang out from Heaven’s throne when in reality the Messenger visibly appeared in the sky above Abraham.”⁶³ How much more shocking would it have been for Abraham to see a person he recognized as YHWH – for he had already fed Him and spoken to Him (Genesis 18) - in the sky above him than to have heard a disembodied

⁶¹ Morey, pp. 142-3

⁶² This is my translation.

⁶³ Morey, pg. 146

voice?! Indeed, Abraham would have had no doubt to whom he was answering, “Here I am!”

That the Angel of YHWH is God Himself is confirmed in verse 12:

כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי יִרְאָ אֱלֹהִים אֶתְּךָ וְלֹא הִשְׁכַּתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי
“[The Angel of YHWH said] ‘For now I know that you fear God
and did not withhold your son, your only son, from Me.’”⁶⁴

The use of the pronouns "I" and "Me" show that the Angel of YHWH is actually אֱלֹהִים, God.

My final example is the story of Moses and the Burning Bush in Exodus 3:1-15.

וַיֵּרָא מִלְּאֲךָ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלִבְתַּאֲשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֶּה
"And the Angel of YHWH appeared to him [Moses] in flames of fire
from the midst of the thorny shrub"⁶⁵

Remembering our earlier discussion of the word רָאָה (*ra'ah*), the Angel of YHWH here physically appeared in the middle of the thorny bush, surrounded by flames of fire.

... the “Messenger of Yahweh” appeared “in” a burning bush. Thus the fire is not the Messenger of Yahweh, but He is standing inside this fire. The conversation which follows reveals that this Messenger is Yahweh manifested in human form.⁶⁶

Verse 4 is also of great interest:

וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה
"And when YHWH saw that he [Moses] went to look God called out to him [Moses] from the midst of the thorny bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!'"

In this verse, the Angel of YHWH, still in the midst of the bush, is identified as God. To add to that, YHWH – distinct from אֱלֹהִים "God" – is identified as seeing Moses come towards the bush. Without hearing anything from YHWH, the Angel of YHWH in the

⁶⁴ This is my translation.

⁶⁵ This is my translation, with Holladay.

⁶⁶ Morey, pg. 149

bush knows to call out to Moses. Could it be that YHWH, watching from the realms of heaven shares knowledge with the Angel of YHWH – also אֱלֹהִים – as well as partaking in the same endeavors? If this is the case, it would be more strong evidence for knowledge of the Trinity by the writer of Exodus (who incidentally, also is Moses).

As if those two verses were not enough, the Angel of YHWH declares Himself to be God in verse 6:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
"And He [the Angel of YHWH] said, I AM the God of your fathers:
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob"

Now, without question, the texts state that the Angel of YHWH is YHWH God Himself. However, it should not escape our notice that, while the texts convincingly identify the Angel of YHWH as YHWH, at the same time, they make careful work of distinguishing Him from YHWH as well.⁶⁷ This is even more proof of the unity in substance and distinction in persons that exist within the Triune God.

Tertullian viewed the appearances of the Angel of YHWH in a similar fashion, with an excellent conclusion:

Tertullian calls these manifestations “rehearsals” for the coming of Jesus. It is not that God needed to rehearse how to communicate with man. Rather, mankind needed to be prepared for the Incarnation, “that we might the more readily believe that the Son of God had come down into the world, if we knew that in times past also something similar had been done” (Against Praxeas 16).⁶⁸

The 1st Person of the Trinity: The Father

Having examined evidence in the Old Testament that suggests the existence of the Trinity, let us now examine the body of evidence that supports the existence of each of

⁶⁷ Torrey, pg. 67

⁶⁸ Woods, “Part 1” pg 5

the individual Persons within the Triune God: the actions, names, and distinctions of the individual persons that demonstrate the "personality" connected to the "divinity." While the individual persons are identified in the examples, at the same time, the evidence also supports the *unity* of the Trinity by demonstrating that each of the Persons is equally given Divine names, Divine titles and attributes, and Divine works and worship. We will examine a sample of these for each of the Persons, beginning with the First, the Father.

The Father's "personality" can be identified by His ability to communicate with another:

The Bible does not describe God as a non-person, but as a living Being who is conscious of His own existence and, thus, can say 'I Am.' God is also conscious of the universe around Him and of man in particular. He has emotions, intellect, and will...He can be prayed to because He can hear and respond. He speaks and enters into communication with man.⁶⁹

This is evidenced in Isaiah 63:15-16:

אַתָּה יְהוָה אֲבִינוּ גֹאֲלֵנוּ מֵעוֹלָם שְׁמֶךָ

"You, O YHWH, are our Father; Our Redeemer from old is Your Name"

Here the prophet Isaiah shows the sense of a paternal relationship between himself and his God, YHWH. "The personhood of the Father is clearly affirmed in this text. Isaiah prayed to אֲבִינוּ ('*avinu*) 'our Father' because, as a living Person, He would be conscious of His own existence and of Isaiah's existence as well."⁷⁰ That it was *the God* of Israel to which Isaiah cried out and titled "Father" is affirmed by the fact that it was יְהוָה

(*YHWH*) who was the one to whom the cry was addressed. This, as part of Isaiah's prayer,

⁶⁹ Morey, pg. 168

⁷⁰ Morey, pg 170

also assumes that, not only is God "listening" but also is able to hear and respond, for one
"must have emotions, intellect and will in order to hear and answer prayer."⁷¹

Another example drawn from the prophets is found in Malachi 2:10:

הָלוֹא אָב אֶחָד לְכֻלָּנוּ הָלוֹא אֵל אֶחָד בְּרָאנוּ
"Is there not one Father for all of us? Is there not one God who created us?"⁷²

In the midst of Malachi's rebuking the people, He identifies the Father as God and as
having part in the work of creation.

This text is a classic example of Hebrew parallelism in which an idea is
repeated a second time but with different words. Thus אָב אֶחָד [my
correction ☺] 'one father' in the first line is the same Person as the
אֵל אֶחָד [my correction ☺] 'one God' in the second line.⁷³

Thus can we see that the writers of the Old Testament, especially the prophets, were
aware of the distinction of Person of the Father within the compound unity of the
Godhead.

The 2nd Person of the Trinity: The Son

The Second Person of the Trinity – the Son, the Messiah, the Savior of the world
– fittingly has a large part in the Old Testament, although not as readily evident as in the
New Testament. Prior to His incarnation as the Christ Jesus, and again afterwards (John
1), the Second Person was identified as a few different concepts: the Son, the Word,
Wisdom, and so forth. It is these references that we can identify in the Old Testament.

A good first example can be found in Proverbs 39:4:

מַה־שְּׁמוֹ וּמַה־שֵּׁם־בְּנוֹ
"What is His [God's] Name or His Son's Name?"⁷⁴

⁷¹ Morey, pg 170

⁷² This is my own translation.

⁷³ Morey, pg. 171

⁷⁴ This is my own translation.

In another example of Hebrew poetry, we can see that God and His Son are considered equal – for otherwise, such a form of parallelism would not have been used. Such equality and yet distinction of persons within the Godhead could not have been related by Agur [the one speaking the proverb] "unless he understood the multi-personal nature of God."⁷⁵ At this point, Morey called upon the commentary of Lange to seal his argument, as would I: "The concluding clauses of this energetic passage are rationally and easily interpreted, if we admit that the ancient Jews had some obscure ideas of a plurality in the divine nature."⁷⁶ I would only amend Lange by claiming that the ideas that the ancient Israelites had regarding the plurality within the Divine nature of the Triune God were *not* obscure.

The Divinity of the Second Person is indicated in Psalm 2:12:

נִשְׁקֵי-בֵר ... אֲשֶׁר־יִפְלֹחֻסֵי בּוֹ
 "Kiss the Son ... Blessed are all who seek refuge in Him."⁷⁷

Quite simply, this verse declares that all who seek refuge in the Son will be blessed – The blessedness of taking refuge in the Son in order to escape His wrath is a clear indication of His true deity because God alone is our Savior (Isa. 45:22). That such language would be attributed to a mere creature would be blasphemous."⁷⁸ The verb יִפְלֹחֻסֵי (*hcosae*) – the gal masculine plural participle of יִפְלֹחֻסֵי (*hcasah*) – “throughout the Psalms always means to put your personal faith and trust in *God* as your ultimate hope in this life and in the life

⁷⁵ Morey, pg. 175

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ This is my own translation, with Holladay.

⁷⁸ Morey, pg. 178

to come...It is *never* used to speak of trusting men or angels...Therefore, to ‘trust’ the Son can only mean to trust Him as *God*.”⁷⁹

Perhaps one of the greatest testaments to the Second Person of the Trinity is the book of Isaiah, a book filled with Messianic prophecies and other references. The first we will examine is Isaiah 7:14 – the prophecy of the virgin birth.

לְכֵן יִתֵּן אֲדֹנָי הוּא לָכֶם לְאוֹת הַגִּיהָ הָעֵלְמָה הָרְהָ וְיִלְדֶת בֵּן וְקָרְאתָ שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל
“Therefore the Lord Himself will give to you a sign: Behold, the virgin will be with child and will bear a Son and she will call His name Immanuel [God with us]”

What more can a name prophesy than the depth of who someone is and what their life is meant to do? Within the name to be given to the Son, עִמָּנוּ אֵל (*immanu 'el*), are both: God, *the* only God, here, with us – to redeem us.

The last verse we will examine from Isaiah, without question, gives Divine Names to the Son of God – Isaiah 9:6:

כִּי־יֵלֵד יִלְד־לָנוּ בֵּן נִתָּן־לָנוּ וְנִתְּהִי הַמְּשָׁרָה עַל־שִׁכְמוֹ
"For a child will be born to you: a son will be given to you;
And the government will be upon His shoulders"
וְיִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּלֶא יוֹעֵץ אֵל גִּבּוֹר אָבִיעַד שֶׁר־שָׁלוֹם
"And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace."⁸⁰

By way of Hebrew parallelism, we are told that the Child who will be born is also the Son who will be given. Thus, the Son is viewed in two different ways. On the one hand, as a Child He is born the son of David. On the other hand, as a Son He is given by the Father. This is the kind of language which led to the development of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ.⁸¹

Hoever, what may be even more interesting, for our case, at least, is the list of Divine Names given to the coming Christ child.

⁷⁹ Morey, pg. 179

⁸⁰ This is my own translation, with Holladay.

⁸¹ Morey, pg. 181

"Wonderful Counselor" - פֶּלֵא יוֹעֵץ (pele' yo'aetz)

The Hebrew word פֶּלֵא (pele') "means the wonderful incomprehensible nature of God."⁸² This same word was used as a name for the Angel of YHWH when He was conversing with Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:17-18). Therefore, in this verse, Isaiah connects the Child of prophecy to that "Angel" – concluding that the Son of God, the child of prophecy, is the same Person of the Trinity as the Angel of YHWH who appeared repeatedly throughout the Old Testament. In fact, "when people saw God in the Old Testament, they were seeing the Son of God in a pre-incarnational appearance."⁸³

The second word in the name is יוֹעֵץ (yo'aetz) identifies Him as "the one who gives wisdom to those who seek it. This was interpreted by the ancient Jews as the divine Wisdom of God, the heavenly Logos."⁸⁴ Anyone familiar with the New Testament can easily see then the connection to the Logos (λόγος) mentioned in John 1.

"Mighty God" - אֵל גִּבּוֹר ('el gibbor)

This is a rather simple name, ascribing to the Child the omnipotence of God as well as the name "God" itself. "The divine name אֵל is always used by Isaiah as a name for God and is *never* used for created beings."⁸⁵

"Father of Eternal Life" - אָבִי עֹד ('aviy 'ad)

Rather than accept the common rendition of this Hebrew name: Everlasting Father, Morey concludes that the full sense of the title is contained in this translation:

"Father of Eternal Life."

⁸² Morey, pg 182

⁸³ Ibid. pg. 182

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 183-4

⁸⁵ Ibid. pg. 184

After a great deal of research on the many issues involved, we have translated אֲבִי־עַד [(‘avi ‘ad)] as ‘Father of eternal life.’ Calvin correctly pointed out ‘The Name *Father* is put for *Author*.’ The word אֲבִי [(‘avi)] ‘father’ thus does not mean the One who *possesses* eternity but the One who *gives* it to others. The word עַד [(‘ad)] ‘eternal’ is not the normal word for absolute eternity. Thus, we conclude that it means that the Son of God will be the Author of eternal life for those who believe in Him.⁸⁶

Morey's point seems to be fairly solid: no laws of the Hebrew language were broken and the theology compromises nothing. The only thing lost is the poetic ring of "Everlasting Father" along with the other names.

"Prince of Peace" - שָׂר-שָׁלוֹם (sar shalom)

This Name, though commented upon the least by my sources, rings the loudest in my ears. Morey is not wrong in interpreting it thus: "He is ... the great God of Peace as well as the Mighty God of war."⁸⁷ However, I think he glossed over the first word: שָׂר (sar) - Prince. The title "King" carries with it a sense of majesty and awe, of power and wisdom; "Prince" however is all of that and more – youth and passion, excitement and joy. Therefore, when connected to the well known Hebrew concept of "peace" - שָׁלוֹם (shalom) - the sense you get is not simply a long, lasting peace, but a peace that fills the heart with excitement and anticipation. It is running through the fields instead of sitting on a hill; it is kissing the girl instead of thinking about it.

The 3rd Person of the Trinity: The Holy Spirit

I will preface this section with what might come to you as a bit of a surprise:

⁸⁶ Morey, pg. 185

⁸⁷ Ibid. pg. 185

"There are actually more references to the Spirit in the Old Testament than all the references to the Father and Son Combined!"⁸⁸ Often, people assume that the Father was in charge of the Old Testament, the Son in charge of the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit in charge all that follows. However, the Old Testament clearly shows that the Holy Spirit was alive and active! It shows Him to be Divine in many ways, and

...likewise the Old Testament clearly teaches the divine personality of the Holy Spirit in predicating of Him such activities (*actions et passions*) as creation (Gen. 1:2), reproving man (Gen. 6:3), speaking through David (2 Sam. 23:1-3), being vexed and embittered by Israel (Is. 63:10).⁸⁹

The last in that list is what we will examine first: Isaiah 63:10:

וְהִמָּה מָרוּ וְעִצְבוּ אֶת־רוּחַ קְדָשׁוֹ
 “But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit”⁹⁰

The verb וְעִצְבוּ (ve'itzbu) is a waw consecutive Piel from עָצַב ('atzav), meaning “to feel profound hurt, pain, and grief.”⁹¹ The same word was used to describe the inward pain that David felt upon hearing of his son Absalom's death (II Samuel 19:1-2). It is through this feeling of grief over rebellion against one's self that identifies the Holy Spirit as being a Person – for only a person – one able to have communicative contact with others – would feel grief over others' reactions to him.

The next example also considers an emotional reaction – one only able to be felt by some person with intellect and emotion. Micah 2:7:

הֲקָצַר רוּחַ יְהוָה
 “Is the Spirit of YHWH impatient?”⁹²

⁸⁸ Morey, pg. 188

⁸⁹ Pieper, pg. 395

⁹⁰ This is my translation.

⁹¹ Morey, pg 189

⁹² This is my translation.

The word here that is translated "impatient" **הַקָּצֵר** (*haqatzar*) is the Qal perfect [with an interrogative *he*] of the root verb **קָצַר** (*qatzaer*), which means "to be impatient." This shows that the Spirit is also capable of negative emotions – such as frustration or anger – as well as positive emotions.

II Samuel 23:1 introduces evidence of action, as opposed to emotion. This will stand as evidence for the multitude of occurrences of the Holy Spirit speaking to or through individuals, including "filling with the Spirit."

רוּחַ יְהוָה דִּבֶּר-בִּי
 “The Spirit of YHWH spoke by me”⁹³

The personhood and divinity of the Spirit are here declared: His word is identified as the word of God and the word itself, with speech being a defining characteristic of humanity, indicates human personhood.

The Holy Spirit is attributed Divinity by being ascribed Divine attributes, such as omnipresence in Psalm 139:7:

אֵינָה אֵלֶיךָ מִרְסָקָה וְאֵינָה מִפְּנֵיךָ אֲבָרָח
 "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?"⁹⁴

The parallelism of Hebrew poetry here shows that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, and “in terms of the context of the entire Psalm, since the omnipresence of God is joined to the omniscience of God (v.6), this reveals that if One possesses one omni-attribute, He will possess them all.”⁹⁵

The Spirit is also identified as participating in Divine works, such as creating and sustaining. Without explanation, these can be seen in the following verses:

⁹³ This is my translation.

⁹⁴ This is my translation.

⁹⁵ Morey, pg 193

רוח־אל עָשָׂתָנִי - Job 33:4
“The Spirit of God has made me”

תִּשְׁלַח רוּחְךָ יִבְרְאוּן וְתַחֲדָשׁ פְּנֵי אֲדָמָה - Psalm 104:30
“You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the ground”

The Trinity in the Old Testament

Having looked at each of the Persons of the Triune Godhead, and, on occasion, two of the Persons working together, all that is left to examine is those evidences of the Trinity, all three Persons, acting as a whole. Morey spoke well in saying: “The unity of the Trinity is revealed as they work together to accomplish common goals.”⁹⁶ The particular collective actions I will examine will be Creation and Redemption.

Genesis 1 – The Story of Divine Cooperation

To discuss the entire creation story would be a book unto itself and is not the focus of this paper, so I have chosen three clauses to examine to argue my case.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים - Genesis 1:1
“In the beginning, God created”

The very first words of the Bible are a testament to the Trinity: God [a plural noun] created [a singular verb]. “The verb ‘to create’ is from the Heb. [בָּרָא] (*bara*’)], which in the form here used describes an activity of God, never of men.”⁹⁷ Alan Richardson echoes this thought:

Whether the word [בָּרָא] means creation *ex nihilo* in an absolute sense may be left to the specialists to decide. But it is clear that something very near that is intended. The word is used only of God...It implies something utterly beyond human imitation or comprehension, for the work of creation is essentially miraculous.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Morey, pg. 197

⁹⁷ Nichol, pg. 208

⁹⁸ Richardson, Alan. *Genesis I – XI: Introduction and Commentary*. (1956) London: SCM Press LTD. pp. 46-7

Some suggest⁹⁹ that the God of this verse actually refers to the first person of the Trinity – an evaluation that is true – but I prefer to think of it as a preface to the introduction to each of the Persons, an introduction to the cooperation of the Persons.

Genesis 1:2 – רִיחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the deep”

The Holy Spirit is here introduced. The interpretation of the noun רִיחַ (*ruach*) is typically divided down the Unitarian / Trinitarian division line: those who deny the Trinity will translate it as “wind,” and those who affirm the Trinity translate it “spirit.”

Alan Richardson gives a prime example of a skeptical interpretation:

[רִיחַ] is wind, breath or spirit; it denotes the vital element in man...and when used of God it might refer to his life-giving power...But here the expression is hardly more than a Hebrew idiom meaning ‘a very strong wind’, and it can scarcely be used to support a doctrine of the Creator Spirit.¹⁰⁰

While “wind” or “spirit” are actually both possible with the available definitions of רִיחַ (*ruach*), Martin Luther gives the most convincing argument for the Trinitarian interpretation: “Wind is a creature which at that time did not yet exist, since so far those masses of heaven and earth lay mixed together.”¹⁰¹

The verb, מְרַחֶפֶת (*merahcepheth*), holds more interest for me. Often translated as “hovering” or “brooding,” it is a participle, and, as such, has a meaning governed by the context. In this context, it assumes a meaning of continual, attentive action. “It reveals that the Spirit of God was the One who superintended each new phase of the Creation.”¹⁰²

Another connotation which is sometimes proposed is that this hovering is like that of a

⁹⁹ Torrey would be an example of such a scholar.

¹⁰⁰ Richardson, pg. 48

¹⁰¹ Luther, pg. 9

¹⁰² Morey, pg. 199

mother hen – keeping warm, keeping safe, checking the temperature, and shifting for the best position. It is this last image which I believe best captures the work of the Holy Spirit. Francis Nichols gives a good conclusion:

From this place onward, throughout the whole Scripture, the Spirit of God has the role of the divine agent of God in all creative acts, whether of the earth, of nature, of the church, of the new life, or of the new man.¹⁰³

Genesis 1:3 - וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
"And God said"

In these two words "God said," I believe the First and Second Persons are contained: the Father is the one who issues, sends forth, while the Son is the operative Word of God – word and action and substance all at once. Such interpretation is echoed in Paul Kretzmann's commentary: "God spoke; the almighty Word of God is here introduced, the second person of the Godhead...The creation of the world is a work of the Triune God."¹⁰⁴ Even Richardson makes mention of the operative power of God's Word, however, he fails to connect it to the Second Person of the Trinity.¹⁰⁵

The act of creation, though worked out with three Persons, was nonetheless a unified act: the Father was all the while issuing forth creative power and authority, the Son was the operative Word – the action itself – and the Spirit was overseeing all, keeping things in good order. It was this same unified front which was presented in all of God's works: One in Three, yet Three in One.

Redemption – A Team Effort

Though not presented in as detailed an explanation as was given Creation, the Redemption of the world is in no way less important. Isaiah 61:1 declares: "The Spirit of

¹⁰³ Nichol, pg. 209

¹⁰⁴ Kretzmann, pg. 2

¹⁰⁵ Richardson, pp. 48-9

the Lord [Yahweh] is upon me, because [Yahweh] has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners.” Sweet release is offered to the world through the Son, empowered by the Spirit and commissioned and sent by the Father. Neither action is more or less important, and each is necessary for completion. That is the nature of the unity of the Persons within the Triune God: distinct yet one, indivisible yet unmixed.

Conclusion

With this, I conclude the first half of my thesis. As seen in the many examples given, the true Triune God can be seen to have revealed Himself already in the Old Testament as being eternally three distinct Persons, yet unquestionably One. Weighing the evidence of words, phrases, and entire accounts found throughout the Old Testament, we can see that, although not stated as fully as in the New Testament, those within the text and those writing the texts were aware enough to recognize a God of three Persons who remained the same One God. Whether the Israelite nation of the Old Testament was Trinitarian in faith remains for a future study to determine; however, we can now see that they had at the least some “suspicion” of complexity within the “oneness” of their God, YHWH.

The Trinity In the Old Testament: A Tool for Evangelism

Having shown how the original text of the Old Testament contains enough evidence of the Trinity to show that the Ancient Israelites had some idea that their God had plurality of persons within a complex “oneness,” it is now my goal to show why this can be used to introduce today’s Jews to the Gospel message and even how that might be done.

To start let me briefly show why the Jews do not already know that the Trinity can be found within their own Scriptures. Since the time of the Second Temple Period, as the Jews settled down in their new homes (having been “dispersed” by their various captors – the Diaspora) or ventured their way back to their homeland, they realized that they had to conceive of a Jewish life without a temple. Judaism was to undergo a shift in focus that would forever change the face of the religion.

No longer was Jerusalem the sole center of faith and life: rather synagogues – small enclaves of religion, education, and Jewish culture – were established all throughout the world. The average Jew turned his attention from the temple and sacrifices to the synagogue, and ultimately, as the religion became more personally relative, inward. The controlling role of the priest was lost, to be replaced by the local rabbi. In time, a “Hedge around the Law” was constructed: the writings of the respected Jewish theologians were established as authoritative. Consequently, the Scriptures lost their position as the lone norm of faith and life.

It was along these lines that Moses Maimonides introduced a radical thought to Judaism, a thought that was soon to become dogma.

Prior to the days of Moses Maimonides the unity of God was expressed by $\aleph \beth$ (*echad*) which, as has been proved beyond a doubt, has as its primary meaning that of a compound unity...a new idea was injected into this confession [His thirteen articles of faith] by substituting $\aleph \beth \aleph$ (*yachid*) which in every passage carries the primary idea of oneness in the absolute sense for $\aleph \beth$ (*echad*) ... from the days of Maimonides on, an interpretation different from the ancient one was placed upon this most important message.¹⁰⁶

Since that time, all traces of Trinitarian belief have been erased from the Jewish faith.

According to the Athanasian Creed, the catholic Christian statement of faith, the Jews are

¹⁰⁶ Morey, pg. 90

destined for damnation! They who once were the chosen children of God have rejected Him, as He has revealed Himself, and now stand as His enemies! It is for that reason that Christians have the awesome opportunity to reach out to the Jews: we hold in our hands the truth to which they have become blinded. We have the light to lead them from darkness.

The One and the Many – A Crucial Concept

Prior to the actions of Moses Maimonides, there existed within Jewish thought a remnant of the ancient Israelite concept of the נִפְשׁ (nephesh). Typically translated as "breath" or "soul," Aubrey Johnson, in a study focused on this topic, argues that the word contains more than those simple renderings offer. "The term נִפְשׁ (nephesh) is obviously being used to indicate, not something conceived as but one (albeit the superior) part of man's being [the soul], but the *complete personality* [italics mine] as a unified manifestation of vital power..."¹⁰⁷ He compares this concept of the "complete personality" to the popular English idiom "putting one's soul into what one says." In the English figure of speech, the "soul" contains the entirety of the mind, emotions, and "self" of the speaker. Not to be confused with the theological concept of the "soul," נִפְשׁ (nephesh) refers to this entirety of mind, emotion, and self.

In the Israelite mind, this נִפְשׁ (nephesh) was extended through one's spoken word as well as one's בַּיִת (bayith) "house" or the household – "the household in its entirety is regarded as a physical whole – the extended personality of the man at its head."¹⁰⁸ In that sense, one's wife and children were united under a man's "complete personality, or

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, Aubrey. *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*. (1961) Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, pg. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. pg. 4

center of vital power.” The נִפְשׁוּת (*nephesh*) could be extended in the same manner through one’s property – animate or inanimate. That is how “...the מַלְאָךְ [(*mal’ak*)] (‘messenger’), as an ‘extension’ of his master’s personality, not merely represents but is virtually the אֲדוֹנָיו [(‘*adone*)] (‘lord’).”¹⁰⁹

Johnson continues: “...in Israelite thought the individual, as a נִפְשׁוּת (*nephesh*) or centre of power capable of indefinite extension, is never a mere isolated unit; he lives in constant reaction towards others.”¹¹⁰ In the constant reactions between one person and another, between one בַּיִת (*bayith*) “house” or another, more than one person acting collectively could be identified as one נִפְשׁוּת (*nephesh*). This is the basis for the Israelite concept of man.

Johnson then moves on to discuss the nature of the Israelite conception of God, comparing it to that of man: “...we must be prepared to recognize for the God head just such fluidity of reference from the One to the Many or from Many to the One as we have already noticed in the case of man.”¹¹¹ In similar fashion to the understanding of man, God was thought to have an “indefinable extension of the Personality” by which He was able to mysteriously influence men. The same held true for His word:

Thus it is that (again as in the case of man) the “Word” may be regarded as a potent “Extension” of Yahweh’s Personality...The “Word” [דָּבָר (*dabar*)] is one with the “thing” [דָּבָר (*dabar*)] which is to be performed; it has objective reality, and thus forms a powerful “Extension” of the divine Personality.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, pg. 5

¹¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 7

¹¹¹ Ibid. pg 16.

¹¹² Ibid. pg 17

Johnson draws from this the conclusion that, through this concept of many acting as one, some sects within Judaism developed a pantheon – such as that evident in the Jewish colony at Elephantine.¹¹³ It was not so much their sectarian nature that spawned the belief in a pantheon of gods as the commonly held concept of the One and the Many. As a result:

Now it is commonly regarded as an extraordinary feature of the conception of the אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה [('elohim YHWH)] (and, therefore, one worthy of special comment) that he is frequently indistinguishable from Yahweh Himself; but the reason for this is now clear. It is but another aspect of that oscillation as between the individual and the corporate unit within the conception of God which we have been studying...¹¹⁴

In conclusion, Johnson suggests that it was through this concept of the One and the Many, both in man and in God, in the minds of the Israelites that allowed for the ready acceptance of the Messiah presented by the Christians¹¹⁵ – the Messiah as the Second Person of the Triune God.

What proves vitally important in Johnson's study is that, somewhere within the depths of the history of Judaism, there exists a line of thought that finds fulfilment in the Trinity. The One and the Many in God is language that begs for the doctrine of the Trinity. So it seems that there remains a "chink in the armor" of Judaism – an hole in the shape of a Triune God by which a Jew might be reached.

The scope of the mission now before us is great, indeed: we must span the ages in the Jewish mind and find the connections between the God of Christendom and the thought of the One and the Many within God that existed in the minds of the Israelites.

¹¹³ Johnson, pg. 17

¹¹⁴ Ibid. pg. 29

¹¹⁵ Ibid. pg. 37

This was also the mission of the Christians of the early church – those most closely connected to Judaism – for in fact, it was in Judaism's midst that Christianity was born.

The Early Church's Evangelism among Judaism

Therefore, let us examine how the earliest Christians reached out to their Jewish brothers.

The Christian Gospel is good news about a Jew. It was preached by Jews to Jews, in the first instance ... When the first followers of Jesus proclaimed him so enthusiastically as Messiah on the Day of Pentecost, they were talking in terms that made sense to their Jewish hearers, whether or not that message was acceptable ... They hoped that Israel would come to share their convictions about Jesus, and thus hasten the triumphant return to set up his Kingdom.¹¹⁶

From the first, the Christian church yearned to show the Jews around them the fulfillment of their own Scriptures in the person of Jesus Christ – the Jew's Messiah! The promises had come true, finally. It was, therefore, with Scripture that the Christians engaged the Jews. Some sought to present newly inspired Scriptures that would appeal to the Jewish mind:

St Matthew's Gospel...seems designed as an apologia, to be used by Christians in reply to curious or critical Jews. And its burden is that Jesus of Nazareth can be shown to have fulfilled the scriptural pattern, that he did not undermine the righteousness of Judaism, but, on the contrary, enhanced and completed it, and that to belong to Christ is truly to belong to Israel.¹¹⁷

Most others simply referred back to the common ground of the Old Testament:

Many a Jewish heart burned within him as he heard the apostolic preaching of Jesus, matched it up with the Old Testament, and found it fitted. We can well imagine the searching of the Scriptures which must have ensued in synagogue after synagogue as Paul and the other missionaries made a start there. For of all the methods of approach of the Christians to the Jews, that of synagogue preaching was most important ...

¹¹⁶ Green, Michael. *Evangelism In the Early Church*. (1970) Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Pg. 78

¹¹⁷ Moule, C.F.D. *The Birth of the New Testament*. (1962) London: dam & Charles Black, pg. 73.

No wonder, then, that Christians made a bee line for the synagogues and preached Jesus as Messiah, according to the Scriptures.¹¹⁸

Another avenue of Scriptural discussion was, as might seem obvious, testaments to the Messiah. As time passed, hopes waned for a coming Deliverer and doubts began to surface. Throughout this time, different groups would compile lists of Messianic prophecies for the purpose of encouragement. It was these same lists that were used by early Christians as inroads to the Jewish mind and heart.

However, the work of evangelism was not without failures. Within the mind of the Jews, at least four major objections arose: Israel's status as the Chosen was claimed by the Christians, Israel's Scriptures were stolen, Israel's law was broken, and Israel's cultus was spiritualized. If a Jew were to come to faith, he would often first have to satisfy those complaints. Because Judaism had become so bent out of shape, it seemed like any Jew who became a Christian had to abandon their heritage – no longer was circumcision mandatory, no longer was the Law the center of focus, and, certainly by this point, the God they were taught was One was now Three in One.

However, the Christians ultimately had something more ethical and liberating than what Judaism had to offer.

...the offer of pardon struck a very congenial note in Jewish circles. Any religion dominated by the concept of Law and moral responsibility before God must lead either to nomism or despair. How can a man be just before his maker? Judaism had no answer. To fail to keep the Law in one point was to be guilty of all. But Christianity had an answer, a credible answer, a reasonable answer. The followers of Jesus claimed that he, acting on God's behalf, had dealt radically and finally with the problem of human failure on the cross ... Pardon for the man who came to God through Christ was understood to be a present possession, an anticipation here and now of the final judgment ... This must have attracted many a noble Jew as greatly as it did Saul of Tarsus, struggling with the load of his sins.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Moule, pg. 81

¹¹⁹ Green, pg 110

Modern Judaism – Still In Need?

Modern Judaism has changed even more than Rabbinical Judaism had changed from the faith of Ancient Israel. Reformed Judaism battles the Orthodox, while the mystics irritate them both. Judaism, however, still lacks Christ and the Triune God, and therefore, lacks what is most important. In his book, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Vol. 2 – Theological Objections*, Michael Brown, a convert to Messianic Judaism presents an argument for Christ and the Triune God much like my own. In fact, my appeal to Scripture above all was, in some ways, mimicking his approach. Anyone looking for the perspective of a Messianic Jew could certainly use this book as a resource.

What remains true, whether in the times of the New Testament or in the Twenty-first century, is that the quickest way to a Jew's heart can be found readily in each and every one of their houses. It is something that they might even know better than you yourself. It is their Bible: what to the Christian is the Old Testament. Judaism has been looking for fulfilment since it was founded as a religion, with the patriarchs of Israel and even Adam himself. What they need to be shown is that Christ Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, is that fulfilment.

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