
United Church of God, *an International Association*



The Nature of God and Christ

Doctrinal Study Paper

Approved by the Council of Elders
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Who is God and what is His nature? Who is Jesus Christ and what is His nature? The principal doctrinal issues that surround discussions on the nature of God and Christ center on the questions of origins, oneness and the incarnation. Each of these topics presents its unique set of questions, but at the same time, they are all intricately related to each other. For example, a discussion on the origin of the Father leads to the question of the origin of the Son, which leads to the question of how the Father and Son can be one. This leads to the question of how any divine being can be made flesh and yet retain His divinity. Over the centuries theologians and Bible students have developed various doctrinal positions on these issues.

The word “theology” is derived from the Greek words *theos* (deity) and *logos* (word or discourse, reckoning, account), literally “God speak” or “God discourse.”¹ Narrowly defined, theology portends to study the origin and essential being of God. Thus, when theologians speak of the nature of God, they are addressing the essential nature of His being. That is, what are the essential characteristics of His being and what is the relationship of the Son to the eternal Father? This definition stands in sharp contrast to what most people are thinking when they speak of the nature of God. They speak of God in terms of His love, mercy and goodness. These are characteristics of God that define who He is and how He views us and how we relate to Him, but theologians are not addressing these characteristics when they speak about the nature of God. They are seeking to explain His essential being as distinct from the characteristics and qualities that define God’s revelation of Himself.

The classic Trinitarian position of three persons in the Godhead has become the hallmark of orthodoxy. However, this study will show that the biblical revelation of the nature of God and Christ stands in sharp contrast to the extrabiblical paradigms that are espoused by theologians. The purpose of this study is to ground Christians in the vital truths that center on the nature of God and Christ—for in these vital truths, God’s wonderful purpose for humanity is revealed.

In spite of the things that we can know about the nature of God and Christ, there is much that we cannot know. We are discussing spiritual matters that are beyond our ability as physical beings to completely comprehend. The apostle John explains that there are things that have “not yet been revealed.” “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Throughout the paper we have chosen to use the term *being* when referring to the Father and the Son. While one can debate the issue of the use of “being” or “person” by theologians, this paper has chosen to use the word *being* when referring to the Father and the Son in the sense of two self-conscious individuals, each possessing free will, though unified in spirit and purpose (John 10:30). We believe that there is only one God not two, but that there are two individuals in the one Godhead.

¹ Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), *Biblical Theology and Redemptive Historical Hermeneutics*, glossary.

Classical Trinitarian View of the Godhead

Trinitarianism is largely the work of theologians who attempt to explain the nature of God from an extrabiblical perspective. Many of their paradigms and arguments are drawn from Greek metaphysical and philosophical constructs. The classic orthodox Trinitarian position states that in the being of the one eternal God there are three eternal and essential distinctions—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—yet no separation. In Western Christendom (Catholic Church) the classical formula has been three persons in one substance; in Eastern Christendom (Greek Orthodox Church) three hypostases (distinctions in being) in one being. This formula asserts that the essential being of God consists of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is, these three persons or hypostases are essential to God’s nature or being. In other words, essential Trinitarianism asserts that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are essential to God’s existence. The formula for the unity of the one true God’s essential being led to the postulation of the origins of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity doctrine allows for no separation of persons. The doctrine calls for mutual interpenetration of the persons of the Godhead, so that although each person is distinct in relation to the others, nevertheless, each participates fully in the being of the others. The Godhead is thus proclaimed to be one and indivisible.

Even though the persons interpenetrate one another, each has a distinct role to play when viewed in relation to the others. These distinctions of roles are most dramatically emphasized in the postulation of the origin of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is said to be uncreated and ingenerate. The Father eternally generates the Son. The Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son through a process called passive spiration. (The Eastern Church teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father through the Son.) The Father’s eternal generation of the Son is understood to be a necessary and not a willed or voluntary act of God. That is, the act of generation is inherent in the nature and essential being of God. Thus, Trinitarians cannot logically question the preexistence of Christ since, according to their doctrine, the Father eternally generates the Son. Furthermore, according to this formula, the relationship of the Father and Son exists in eternity.

The Trinitarian model of the Godhead can be illustrated by using three concentric circles. The Father occupies the center position as He eternally generates the Son; the Son occupies the second circle owing His being to the Father’s generation, while the third circle is the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son.

The incarnation of the Son presents Trinitarians with a series of logical inconsistencies. For example, how is the “essential nature” of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit preserved when the Word is made flesh? If any person in heaven is taken out of the model, the whole paradigm is shattered. Yet Trinitarians contend that the Father continued generating the Son in heaven, even while He was conceived in Mary’s womb and during the time He tabernacled on earth in the flesh. Thus, a “second” Son is introduced—one who is being eternally generated in heaven and one on the earth. Moreover, a fourth entity enters the equation—three in heaven and one on the earth.

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Theologians have vainly attempted to explain their dilemma away by appealing to the distinctions in the Godhead. That is, the Son as one of the persons in the Godhead was made flesh, suffered and died for our sins. But how can this be so since, according to Trinitarians, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are interpenetrated and each fully participates in the being of the others, thus ensuring the oneness and indivisibility of the Godhead? Regardless of theologians' attempts to get around this quandary by emphasizing distinctions in the Godhead, they are hopelessly entangled in a series of contradictions.

The logical outcome of insisting that all three persons fully participate in the being of the others is called Patripassionism. That is, God the Father suffered and died for the sins of the world. Explanations of ways of being God, or emphasizing distinctions in the Godhead, cannot negate the fact that according to this doctrine, if one of these persons dies, they all die. Sadly, this doctrine reduces Jesus Christ to mere human flesh that died for the sins of the world. Or at best, proponents of this doctrine are in essence saying that God gave a part of Himself to Himself, a mere mortal, since the eternally generated Son is safe and sound in heaven. Yet Christ cried out on the cross, "...Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Scripture clearly reveals that God the Father resurrected Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11).

The classic Trinitarian paradigm is further shattered by the glorious resurrection of Christ from the dead. Trinitarians insist on a "body only" resurrection in an attempt to preserve their model of the Father eternally generating the Son. Their insistence on a bodily resurrection only denies Christ's resurrection as a life-giving spirit, a separate and distinct entity—who now sits on the right hand of God (1 Corinthians 15:44-45; Acts 2:33; 7:56). Trinitarians realize that the resurrection of Christ as a life-giving spirit introduces a fourth person into the Godhead. So they insist He received only a bodily resurrection from the dead, implying that only the body of Jesus died since the Father eternally generates Him. Thus they deny His death on the stake and imply that He resurrected Himself.

One can readily discern the inherent contradictions contained in the doctrine of the Trinity as proponents attempt to explain the origins and oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Is the one who became the Son of God in the flesh a created being? If He is not a created being, how did He come into existence? If He is a created being, how and when did He come to exist?

Question of Origins

The question of the origin of God the Father is seldom discussed. The scriptural proclamations on the eternal existence of God the Father are universally accepted. The Father is viewed as an uncreated, eternal being. But the question of the origin of the Son presents many different scenarios.

Christology is the study of the divinity of the Son and His relationship to the Father. Christology must start with theology since the origin and role of the Father in the Godhead must be considered in conjunction with the nature of Christ. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus Christ was both the Son of God and God in the flesh. If Jesus Christ is the Son of God,

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what is His relationship to the Father? Is the one who became Christ an uncreated being who is coeternal with the Father? Furthermore, what is the origin of the one who came to earth proclaiming that the Father had sent Him from heaven?

Summary of Principal Views on the Origin of Christ

Classical Trinitarianism views the Son as being eternally generated by the Father. One form of Arianism views the one who was incarnated as a special creation of God. Another form of Arianism views the one who was incarnated as the angel of God's presence who is the principal angel in the Council of the Gods.

Other views hold that the Word who was with God in the beginning, as explained in John 1:1, was uncreated and coeternal with the Father. These views uphold the preexistence of the one who became the Son of God.

There are other Christological views that deny the preexistence of Christ. Even though there are some major distinctions in some of these positions, they can be grouped according to their major premises. One view asserts that Christ came into existence when He was conceived in the womb of Mary. Another view states that God's nature was incarnated in the womb of Mary. This view in effect asserts that God made up a person from Himself to die for the sins of the world, thus denying that the Word was sent from heaven to die for the sins of the world. The third view asserts that Christ was a special agent of God, a mere man, who was designated to die for the sins of the world. Another view asserts that Christ is a created being who is equated with *YHWH* (the tetragrammaton or four letters) of the Old Testament and the Word of John 1:1-14. In their fervor to preserve the oneness of God and avoid polytheism, they deny the preexistence of Christ.

OLD TESTAMENT SECTION

The Tetragrammaton

In Exodus 3:6, *Elohim* (Hebrew name for God) introduces Himself to Moses as the *Elohim* of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But Moses protests and asks, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). God promises Moses that He will be with him and that Israel would some day worship on that mountain. Moses is still not convinced, and he inquires further, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?'" (Exodus 3:13). God then replies, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).

The I AM THAT I AM (*YHWH*) became the personal name of Israel's God. The Hebrew consonants (*YHWH*) originated with the Hebrew verb "to be." Thus the Septuagint translates Exodus 3:14 *ego eimi ho on*, "I am the one who is."² This definition is in harmony with the *Word*

² Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (ed.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 1992, p. 355.

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Biblical Commentary, which states, “I AM that I AM, literally means ‘the One Who Always Is.’”³ There is no question that the Jews were very familiar with the meaning and significance of the name “I AM THAT I AM.”

In the discourse Jesus had with the Jews, as recorded in John 8, He refers to Himself as preexisting Abraham. Jesus stated the fact that the Jews had never really known the Father and that He had come to reveal Him. The Jews ask, “‘Where is Your Father?’ Jesus answered, ‘You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also’” (John 8:19). Yet Jesus informed them earlier, “I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true” (John 8:16-17). Thus He distinguishes Himself from the Father and affirms that the testimony that He bears is from two distinct beings.

As the discussion continues, it gets more intense, Jesus tells them that they are of their father, Satan the devil. They insist that Abraham is their Father. Jesus then introduces the idea of eternal life, “Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (John 8:51). The Jews are very disturbed by Jesus’ assertion. They note that Abraham and the prophets are dead and they ask, “Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (John 8:53). Jesus tells them that He is not honoring Himself, “It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word” (John 8:54-55). The stage is now set for the great bombshell.

Jesus then asserts that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. The Jews are infuriated by this assertion and ask Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” (John 8:57). Then Jesus drops the bomb, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). The Jews knew exactly what He was saying. They knew that Jesus was boldly proclaiming that He is eternal and that He is the Son of God. This is why they took up stones to kill Him. In their minds He was guilty of blasphemy.

In the book of Revelation, John is commanded to write, “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’” (Revelation 1:8). There is no question that Jesus Christ is also the “I AM.” This is not to say that God the Father is not also the “I AM.” But it is to say that the Gospel of John, especially John 1:1, and the book of Revelation demonstrate the coeternity of God the Father and the one who is now sitting as His right hand, the living Word of God, Jesus Christ.

However, there are some exegetes who contend that the phrase “I am the Alpha and the Omega” in Revelation 1:8 is referring to God the Father and not to Jesus Christ. While there is some debate among commentators whether verse 8 refers to the Father or to Christ, most commentaries (including Jamieson, Fausset and Brown; Darby; Matthew Henry; and John Walvoord) attribute the term “I am the Alpha and the Omega” in Revelation 1:8 to Christ. The contextual and internal evidence show that verse 8 is clearly referring to Jesus Christ. The

³ John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 1987, Vol. 3, “Exodus,” p. 39.

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antecedent to verse 8 is clearly established in verse 7. It is Jesus Christ who will come in the clouds, it was Jesus Christ who was pierced and died for the sins of the world. Thus, He is the “Alpha and Omega” of verse 8.

In reading the book of Revelation one should keep in mind that Jesus Christ is the revelator and the principal spokesman. In verse 10 John hears a voice like a trumpet and the voice states, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.” John then turns to see the voice that was speaking and sees seven golden lampstands with one like the Son of Man walking in the midst of them with seven stars in His right hand and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. John is so shaken by the vision that he falls as dead before the one who is speaking, and the one speaking instructs John not to fear. Then the one speaking clearly identifies Himself saying, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Revelation 1:10-18).

Only Christ could make the claim that He was dead and is now alive. Later in the book of Revelation John is inspired to write, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Revelation 22:13). “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (verse 16). Clearly, the contextual and internal evidence demonstrate the term “Alpha and Omega” in the book of Revelation is referring to Jesus Christ.

Moreover, even if one argues that Revelation 1:8 is referring to God the Father—the fact remains that Jesus Christ also identifies Himself as, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, . . . the First and the Last.” Thus, Jesus’ clear statements in the book of Revelation make it abundantly clear that He exists in eternity.

The Shema and the “Oneness” of God

The Shema is the fundamental confession of the Jewish religion. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one [Hebrew, *echad*] LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4, King James Version). The Shema is not a prayer but rather a “confession of faith or creed.”⁴ It is seen as the creed that proclaims the oneness and uniqueness of God. To the Jews the Shema is not only an “assertion of monotheism, it is also an assertion of the numerical oneness of God which is contradictory to the Christian view of the Trinity of the Godhead.”⁵

Jesus came proclaiming a controversial and revolutionary message about God and the way to eternal life. He proclaims He was sent to reveal the Father, which no man has ever seen or heard (John 1:18; 5:37). Furthermore, Jesus claims that He is the Son of God, the bread of life sent by the Father from heaven (John 6:32-40). His message was particularly inflammatory to the Jews, even though they were familiar with the *Logos* terminology—nevertheless, they rejected the idea of God becoming flesh. Any suggestion that God exists as more than one being, or that a human being could be God in the flesh, was viewed by most of the Jewish sects as blasphemy.

⁴ G.W. Bromily, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1988, Vol. 4, p. 469.

⁵ Frank E. Gabelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1992, Vol. 4, p. 69.

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So does the Shema indeed state that there is only one being in the Godhead? The great Jewish scholar Maimonides addresses this problem in his writings. In his “Thirteen Principles of Faith” he actually changes the Hebrew *echad* used in Deuteronomy 6:4 to *yachid* in expressing the oneness of God. However, when Moses wrote Deuteronomy 6:4, he used the word *echad*, which allows for more than one as in the case of Adam and Eve becoming one (*echad*).

In addition to the problem with *echad*, Maimonides was hard-pressed to find a satisfactory solution to the plural pronouns that Moses uses in referring to God in the Torah. So he suggests changing the text and dropping them altogether and substituting singular references in his attempt to preserve strict monotheism. Obviously this is not the solution since this would change the original intent of the Scriptures.

Scholars are now bringing to light the influence of Maimonides in making the Shema the hallmark of Judaism. On the Web site “Most Frequent Questions in Jewish Evangelism” from Northwestern University, the following quote shows how Maimonides changed *echad* to *yachid* in his attempts to preserve strict monotheism:

Even more striking is the very word used in the Sh'ma to proclaim the oneness of God: *echad*. This word allows for plurality or diversity within the unity. This can be seen clearly in several passages. In Genesis 1:5, 2:24, Ezra 2:64 and Ezekiel 37:17, the oneness is the result of combining evening and morning, man and wife, the individual members of an assembly and two sticks, respectively. There is, however, another Hebrew word to describe an indivisible unity: *yachid*. The scholar Maimonides, when composing his famous Thirteen Articles of Faith, substituted *yachid* for *echad* in describing the nature of God. Ever since, the notion of an indivisible unity of God has been fostered by Judaism; nevertheless, the Bible gives ample instances to show that there is a diversity within God's unity.⁶

Another writer, Dr. Michael L. Brown, author and founder of ICN Ministries, commenting on the Jewish scholar Maimonides writes:

In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides, writing to counter Christian and Muslim beliefs, compiled his thirteen articles of faith, recited by observant Jews daily. One of the articles states that Jews must believe that God is *yachid*—“absolute unity.” But this is unscriptural...

Author Sam Stern comments on Maimonides and attributes his writings with defining monotheism among the Jews:

Yet, the Jewish understanding of “one God” evolves not from the Scriptures, but from Maimonides' Thirteen Articles of Faith. When he formulated these principles, he replaced the word *echad*, which appears in the Bible and means a unity of more than one element, with another word, *yachid*, that means an absolute one. Maimonides influenced

⁶ <http://groups.northwestern.edu/crusade/resources/apologetics/TheMostFrequentQuestionsInJewishEvangelism>.

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the Jewish people so greatly that they accepted his teaching as the Word of God and his representation of one God as *yachid*.⁷

So what is the meaning of *echad*? According to Gesenius' *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon*, *echad* means "to unite, to join together, to be in unity."⁸ *Echad* also conveys the idea of being "bound together" like the cords of a rope. The tighter the cords are bound, the greater the strength produced. *Echad* does indeed mean "one" but it is a oneness that is produced by a collective unity. This idea of collective unity is clearly demonstrated in Genesis 2:23-24, "And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one [*echad*] flesh." Here two distinct individuals are "one" flesh. This is not talking about one in number but one in collective unity, harmony, peace and the sharing of common goals. Adam and Eve were joined together, twisted, bound and wrapped together in singleness of purpose.

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* confirms this broader meaning for *echad*:

"one, same, single, first, each, once..., closely identified with *yahad* to be united and...stresses unity while recognizing diversity within that oneness... [i.e.] Adam and Eve are described as 'one flesh' (Gen 2:24), which includes more than sexual unity... Ezekiel predicted that the fragmented nation of Israel would someday be reunited, as he symbolically joined two sticks (37:17)."⁹

The above sources clearly show that *echad* cannot be used to justify strict monotheism. As shown above, the notion of strict monotheism as the hallmark of Jewish orthodoxy can largely be attributed to the work of Mamonides.

In summary, the Shema is not addressing philosophical issues such as absolute or compound unity of God. (Would anyone even be thinking of such a question in ancient Israel?) Rather, it is proclaiming to the children of Israel that the LORD *alone* is their God—He and no other.

For this reason, the New Jewish Publication Society Version (NJPSV) translates Deuteronomy 6:4 as, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone." Moshe Weinfeld, a leading Jewish biblical scholar who for technical grammatical reasons translates it as "Hear, O Israel! YHWH our God is one YHWH," titles his discussion of Deuteronomy 6:4-25 "Exclusive allegiance to YHWH." *The entire thrust of Deuteronomy 6:4 was that the Lord alone was to be Israel's God.*

⁷ Sam Stern, <http://www.thechristianrabbi.org/threearone.htm>.

⁸ H.W.F. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979, p. 28.

⁹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Moody Press.

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The purpose of Deuteronomy 6:4 is to show ancient Israel that their *Elohim* is the only God and that all the pagan gods are to be rejected. Thus the purpose is not to explain the nature of God but to show that He is unique and the only God to worship. (For a more detailed study of *echad* and specifically the phrase “is one,” and its usage in the Old Testament, please see Appendix B.)

God (*Elohim*) in the Plural or Collective Sense

The Hebrew word *Elohim* is used for God in the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God [*Elohim*] is one LORD.” In fact, the construction of this sentence is interesting because it “can be interpreted as two nominative sentences in sequence or as one nominative sentence with three different possibilities as to subject and predicate.”¹⁰ Furthermore, support for the traditional suggestion that this passage contains within itself a “mono-yahwistic” statement can no longer be maintained to the degree that it once was. Botterweck states:

Job 23:13 must be rejected as a proof for “one” God in the Old Testament. The context demands a verb, cf. 9:12. Read *be’echad* (infinitive from ‘hz, as extent dialectical variant of ‘hd, in which the zayin and the dalet are interchanged): “when He snatches away, who can hinder Him?” In Deuteronomy 6:4, *yvh ‘elohenu yvh ‘echad* can be interpreted as two nominative sentences in sequence or as one nominative sentence with three different possibilities for the subject and for the predicate. In the Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic material, ‘*elohenu*, our God, is to be understood as in apposition to YHVH, because when ‘*Elohim* is used predicatively after YHVH, it is always preceded by *hu’* (Deuteronomy 4:35; 7:9; Josh. 24:28; 1 K. 8:60). The Nash Papyrus also, which adds *hu’* at the end, has understood it in this way, and so has the LXX. Whether the second YHVH is a repetition of the subject after the apposition or whether it is part of the predicate must remain an open question. The interpretation given above is possible with either syntactical explanation.¹¹

Thus it is clearly demonstrated from the meaning of *echad* and *Elohim* that the Shema does not prove strict monotheism. (For a more detailed analysis of the use of plural terms in the Old Testament, please Appendices C and D.)

Anthropomorphic or Amorphical God

As explained above, the so-called Old Testament *monotheistic* imperative (the Shema) does not limit God to one being. The Scribes and Pharisees refused to confess that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Orthodox Christianity has made a similar mistake by trying to force the clear references in the New Testament of more than one personality (God the Father and Son) into one being. The result is a quagmire of confusion and various Trinitarian paradigms. The various Trinitarian constructions make God analogous to a turtle with three heads under a shell—with the appropriate head manifesting itself at the proper time.

¹⁰ Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 1974, Vol. 1, p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

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Trinitarian constructions of God also tend to make God into a mysterious spiritual blob—God is not something or someone. In contrast to this notion, God reveals Himself in anthropomorphic terms, from Genesis to Revelation. When *YHWH* appeared to Abram, He did so in human form. Very often when God showed Himself in visions to the ancient prophets, He did so in human form (Daniel 7:9-10). When Christ appeared to the disciples in the transfiguration with Moses and Elijah in order to demonstrate what the Kingdom of God would be like, He did so in human form (Matthew 17:2). God and Christ are described in several passages of Scripture in the New Testament as sitting on a throne side by side (Acts 2:33-34; 7:56; Hebrews 8:1).

Throughout the Bible, God's body parts are described—for example, arms and hands (Psalm 89:13), face (Genesis 33:10), eyes and ears (Isaiah 37:17), nose (Genesis 8:21), a mouth (Matthew 4:4), lips (Job 11:5) and many other references. When Moses asked to see God in His glorified form, he was only allowed to see His “back” while peering from behind a rock (Exodus 33:22).

The Hebrews initially regarded *YHWH* as anthropomorphic, but as time went on He gradually lost form.¹² Paul Johnson succinctly describes the process in the epilogue of his book titled *A History of the Jews*: “Indeed monotheism itself can be seen as a milestone on the road which leads people to dispense with God altogether.”¹³ Alan Dershowitz contends that this “progression from one God to an ‘unknowable force’ and then to ‘nature’ has, in fact, been part of the history of religion.”¹⁴ (For a more detailed study on whether the first-century Jews were strict monotheists, please see Appendix E.)

The God of the Old Testament

It is too simplistic to state that every reference to *YHWH* or *El* in the Old Testament is a reference to the One who became Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there are numerous references in the Old Testament to a being identified as *YHWH* or *El* who cannot be God the Father.

A portion of Isaiah is an example of this. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This is universally recognized as a messianic prophecy. The Jews see it as messianic, but some versions of the Tanak¹⁵ do not translate the Hebrew in the last phrase of verse 6 into English. They translate it as follows: “For a child is born unto us, a son is given unto us; and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called *Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-*

¹² John P. McKay, Bennett D. Hill and John Buckler, *A History of Western Society*, p. 40.

¹³ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 1987, p. 585.

¹⁴ Allan M. Dershowitz, *Chutzpah*, 1991, p. 183.

¹⁵ A term used among Jews for the Hebrew Bible; the Old Testament (freedictionary.com, 2004).

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shalom.” Thus they obscure the fact that *el-gibbor* means the almighty God. The verse is really stating that the Messiah is also the almighty God.

The term *el-gibbor* is also found in Isaiah 10:21 and is here translated as “God the Mighty.” Throughout the book of Isaiah references to *El* are translated as “God.” In Luke 1:32 the angel Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus “will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David.” Thus we see that the one who became Christ is the Son of the Highest and is the same one referenced in Isaiah 9:6 as the “Mighty God.” The understanding that Jesus is the Son of the Highest is critical to our understanding of the Godhead. Jesus was not a created being or just a manifestation of the Father. He is the Son of God. As will be seen later, the one who became the Son of the Highest existed in eternity as the Logos, the Word, until He was conceived by the Father in the womb of Mary.

Was the promised Messiah to be Immanuel or just another man who had no prior existence? Isaiah was inspired to write that His name would be Immanuel, that is, God with us (Isaiah 7:14). That Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ is confirmed by Mathew’s Gospel: “‘And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.’ So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:21-23). So there can be no doubt that Jesus was the divine Son of the living God.

Trinitarians would not argue with the fact that Jesus is divine and the Son of God. They would merely point to the classic Trinitarian model in which it is asserted that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are interpenetrated and each fully participates in the being of the others, thus according to their model the oneness and indivisibility of the Godhead is absolute.

However, there are numerous scriptures in the Old Testament that clearly reveal that there are two separate entities referred to in the Scriptures. An example of this is found in the book of Isaiah. “Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to Him whom man despises, to Him whom the nation abhors, to the servant of rulers: ‘Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You’” (Isaiah 49:7). The Holy One is an obvious reference to Jesus Christ. He is the One whom the nation despises. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). However, John the Baptist, Anna the prophetess and many others viewed Him as the Lamb of God, the Savior who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:36; Luke 2:36-38). They obviously understood that the Messiah would be more than a mere son of David.

The prophet Zechariah presents another example of *YHWH* being identified with the Messiah: “Behold, the day of the LORD [Hebrew *YHWH*] is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD [Hebrew *YHWH*] will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives

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shall split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south... Thus the LORD [Hebrew *YHWH*] my God will come, and all the saints with You [margin—Him]... And the LORD [Hebrew *YHWH*] shall be King over all the earth..." (Zechariah 14:1-5, 9).

The New Testament reveals that Christ is the one who will return as a conquering king, that He will reign on the earth for 1,000 years and that the saints will be with Him when He returns. Can there be any doubt that Zechariah 14 is speaking of the second coming of Jesus Christ? Yet He is clearly identified by the "proper name" for God in the Old Testament—*YHWH*! It is clear that the name *YHWH* can be used to identify both God the Father and the one who later becomes Jesus Christ (the Word). The context determines which one is being referred to as *YHWH*. Scripture clearly reveals the preexistence of Christ before His human birth and that He is often called *YHWH* in the Old Testament. Thus there is indisputable evidence of two in the Old Testament and confirmation of this fact in the New Testament.

Theophanies

On numerous occasions *YHWH* appears to various persons in the Old Testament. However, the Sopherim (scribes), in their mistaken zeal of deanthropomorphizing God, changed the text to read *Adonai* instead of *YHWH* in 134 passages in the Old Testament.¹⁶ Christ states that no one had heard the voice of God or seen His form (John 5:37). Yet Moses heard the voice of *YHWH* and also saw His back parts (Exodus 33:23). Thus, the one who spoke to Moses and revealed His form to Moses could not have been the Father. An examination of some of the more prominent theophanies will graphically demonstrate that *YHWH* was seen and heard by various persons in Old Testament times.

The 18th chapter of Genesis reports a conversation between Abraham and a being identified as LORD (*YHWH*). Genesis 18:3 is one of the 134 places where the Masoretes changed the Hebrew *YHWH* to *Adonai*.¹⁷ This emendation makes it appear as if Abraham was speaking with a "lord" but not with *YHWH*.

There are several other places in Abraham's discussion with *YHWH* that the Masoretes changed the name from *YHWH* to *Adonai*. The verses include Genesis 18:3, 27, 30, 32; 19:18. In each of these verses, the desire to prevent readers from ascribing human qualities to *YHWH* appears to be the only reason for changing the original text.

Another example is found in Psalm 45. This chapter is problematic if one concludes there is only one being called God in the Old Testament. Notice Psalm 45:6-7: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." Hebrews 1:8 provides the key to understanding this verse: "But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'" Is there any doubt that the apostle Paul is

¹⁶ Ethelbert Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 32.

¹⁷ See Appendix 32 of *The Companion Bible* for the complete list of 134 passages.

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referring to Jesus Christ as “God” in this verse? The Son is being addressed as “O God.” The entire first chapter of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus Christ, the Son, is the only begotten Son of God and the stamped image of God the Father. In Hebrews 1:3 the Son is described as “...being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

H.B. McDonald writes, “The word translated ‘express image’ (AV) is *charakter*, from which we derive our English word ‘character’; and the word for ‘person’ is *hypostaseos* which has the idea of essence. Thus the Son of God has the very character of God’s essential being... Jesus is God thrown on the screen of human life.”¹⁸

Paul explains that Jesus is the *reflected brightness* of the glory of God, which means that He is the *exact image* of His *essence*. In other words, Jesus is God in all His substance, nature and character. Thus the use of plurality in the Old Testament infers what the New Testament makes clear—there are two in the Godhead.

We should be careful not to conclude that there are two Gods in the divinity. There is only one God, although there are, at the present time, two beings in the Godhead—God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. One analogy that helps explain the nature of the Godhead is the idea of a family. God can be defined as a family—one God family, although currently consisting of two beings. This analogy is used in the Bible to describe the unity of the Father and the Son (John 17; Ephesians 3:15; Romans 8).

Angel of God’s Presence and *YHWH*

Who is the one who thundered the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai and led Israel in the wilderness? Is the *YHWH* who gave the Ten Commandments and led Israel in the wilderness also referred to as the Angel of His presence? And did this one become Jesus Christ?

Embedded in the passages in which *YHWH* spoke the statutes and judgments to Moses is an often overlooked set of verses that are very germane to the questions at hand. These verses definitively state that the name of God was given to the Angel (Hebrew *malak*, messenger) that led Israel into the Promised Land. “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries” (Exodus 23:20-22). The Hebrew word *malak* that is translated “Angel” literally means “messenger.” It can refer to divine messengers or human messengers. The context determines whether it refers to a physical messenger or a divine messenger. In this case, this Angel is God’s divine messenger who has God’s name in Him. Is this Messenger the one who became Jesus Christ? Let’s examine the possibilities. This being has the name of God in Him.

¹⁸ H.D. McDonald, *Jesus—Human and Divine: An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968.

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The only angels that are called by name in the Bible are the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Lucifer (who rebelled and became Satan). Moreover, this Messenger—this one who is called God—has the power to pardon sin. Such power was never vested in angels.

Someone might argue that the angel of reference is Michael since the literal meaning of the Hebrew name, *Miyka'el*, means “who is like God.” But *Miyka'el* is not a primary name of God and there is no clear evidence that the name *Miyka'el* is used for God in any place in the Bible. But there is a place in Scripture that equates the Angel, *Malak*, who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush with *YHWH*. “And the Angel of the LORD [*YHWH*] appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn. So when the LORD [*YHWH*] saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ Moreover, He said, ‘I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God [*Elohim*]” (Exodus 3:3-6).

In verse 2, the Angel (*Malak*) appears to Moses in the burning bush, and then in verse 4, it is *YHWH* who calls to Moses out of the midst of the burning bush. *YHWH* commands him to pull off his shoes because the ground is holy. Holy things have God’s active presence in them. Thus God was present. One could argue that an angel got Moses’ attention and then suddenly *YHWH* appeared on the scene. Was God playing hide and seek with Moses? Was He playing name games with Moses? It is clear that the Messenger (*Malak*) and *YHWH* are one and the same being.

One of the best-known messianic prophecies verifies the fact that *Malak* and *Adonai* can refer to Jesus Christ. “Behold, I send My messenger [*malak*—John the Baptist], and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord [*Adon*—Jesus Christ], whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger [*Malak*—Jesus Christ] of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says the LORD [*YHWH*] of hosts [God the Father]” (Malachi 3:1).

The first messenger is John the Baptist, “As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You’” (Mark 1:2). The Messenger (*Malak*) of the covenant is Jesus Christ. Christ came and became the sacrificial Lamb, the New Covenant Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Lord (*Adon*) is Jesus Christ, as verified by Christ when (quoting from Psalm 110:1) He asked the Pharisees, if David called *Adonai* (or *Adon*) Lord, then whose Son is He? The answer, of course, is the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Matthew 22:41-45). Jesus came to the physical temple and cleansed it. He founded the New Covenant Church. There is no question that He is the *Malak* (Messenger) of the covenant. So, it is possible that *Malak* can refer to the one who became Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, angels are created beings. They were created through the Word, the one who became Jesus Christ. “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things

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were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:14-17). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul makes it clear that forgiveness of sin is through Jesus Christ and that the one who became Christ created the angelic realm. No angel was ever given the power to forgive sin. Thus the Angel (Hebrew, *Malak*) in this and many other passages is none other than Jesus Christ.

Angels were never promised sonship, neither are they heirs of God. “For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You?’ And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’?” (Hebrews 1:5). The answer is, God never promised any of the angels that His name would be in them and that they would be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). Angels were created, they were not born into the family of God. They are created beings that are sent forth as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Note carefully that angels are sent to the heirs of salvation; they are not themselves heirs of salvation. Moreover, it is not possible for angels to become heirs on the same plane of existence as God since they are created beings. But believers are recipients of the divine nature, the very essence of God (2 Peter 1:4).

Stephen in his inspired sermon, as recorded in Acts 7, asserts that an Angel [Greek, *Angelos*, Messenger] spoke to Moses from Mount Sinai and with the fathers: “This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel [*Angelos*, Messenger] who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt” (Acts 7:37-39).

Note carefully that Stephen equates the Angel who spoke to Moses with the one who spoke the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai. Stephen’s equating of the Angel (*Angelos*, Messenger) who spoke the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel from Mount Sinai is verified by Moses: “And God [*Elohim*] spoke all these words, saying: ‘I am the LORD [*YHWH*] your God [*Elohim*], who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:1-2). These verses clearly reveal that the one who thundered the Ten Commandments is the same Angel (Greek *Angelos*, Messenger) that Stephen refers to in Acts 7:37-39. And that Messenger is none other than the one who became Jesus Christ. The point of Stephen’s discourse is that the Prophet who was prophesied to come was none other than Jesus Christ (Acts 7:52-53).

Who Was Married to Israel?

Who was married to Israel? Was it God the Father or was it the one who became Jesus Christ? If the one who was married to Israel was the one who became Jesus Christ, then the preexistence of Christ is irrefutable. According to Jewish tradition, Israel entered into the Old Covenant/marriage covenant at Sinai on the day of Pentecost in the third month of their journey

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toward the Promised Land. The account of the complete ceremony is recorded in chapters 19-24 of Exodus.

Before Israel entered into the marriage covenant, *YHWH* spoke the Ten Commandments directly to the children of Israel. “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever...’” (Exodus 19:9). Moses then went down and warned the people not to come near or touch the mountain. *YHWH* then spoke the Ten Commandments directly to the people (Exodus 20:2-17). The people were so frightened that they fled from the mountain and asked Moses to speak to them instead of *YHWH* (Exodus 20:18-21). “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven”’” (Exodus 20:22). Then *YHWH* gave the statues and judgments to Moses (Exodus 20:23-24:3). Moses wrote them down and got up early the next morning and built an “altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars” and prepared sacrifices. Then the people came before the altar and the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled on them. Moses read the words of the covenant, the people agreed to the terms, and the covenant/marriage was consummated (Exodus 24:4-8).

Now note carefully what happened after the marriage covenant was consummated. “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exodus 24:9-11). Note carefully the words “they saw God.” Yet Jesus Christ stated that no man had heard the voice of the Father or seen His shape (John 1:18; 5:37). Moreover, Christ stated that no one can know the Father unless the Son reveals Him (Luke 10:22). Thus we can safely conclude that the one who entered into the marriage covenant with Israel was the one who became Jesus Christ.

Israel played the harlot and forced *YHWH* to give her a bill of divorcement. The first two chapters of the book of Hosea graphically describe Israel’s whoredoms. “Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts” (Hosea 2:2). And the prophet Isaiah declares, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce, whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away’” (Isaiah 50:1). If God the Father married Israel and put her away, is He then the one to marry the Israel of God under the terms of the New Covenant? If so, this would clearly contradict the New Testament that explains it is Christ, and not God the Father, who is to marry the Church (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-8).

According to the apostle Paul, “...the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man” (Romans 7:2-3). God the Father did not die for the sins of the world. Israel is not dead. So which member of the Godhead is free to marry the Israel of God

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under the terms of the New Covenant? Paul clearly provides the answer. “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (Romans 7:4). Hence it is clearly revealed in the New Testament that Christ is in the husband role to the Church and the Church is going to marry Him (Ephesians 5:22; Revelation 19:7-8).

In the book of Hebrews, Paul further clarifies what was required for the dissolution of the Old Covenant/marriage relationship. “And for this reason He [Christ] is the Mediator of the new covenant [Greek *diatheke*] by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives” (Hebrews 9:15-17). Some might want to argue that Paul’s reference to a testator implies that Christ was the “testator” of a will. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* refutes this interpretation:

While the terminology in Heb. 9:16, 17 has the appearance of being appropriate to the circumstances of making a will, there is excellent reason for adhering to the meaning “covenantmaking.” The rendering “the death of the testator” would make Christ a Testator, which He was not. He did not die simply that the terms of a testamentary disposition might be fulfilled for the heirs. Here He who is “the Mediator of a new covenant” (v. 15) is Himself the Victim whose death was necessary. The idea of “making a will” destroys the argument of v. 18... We may render somewhat literally thus: ‘For where a covenant (is), a death (is) necessary to be brought in of the one covenanting; for a covenant over dead ones (victims) is sure, since never has it force when the one covenanting lives’ [Christ being especially in view].¹⁹

In the preceding verses Paul uses a play on words to convey a dual message: 1) The Old Covenant/marriage relationship was dissolved and, 2) His death brought redemption and the promise of eternal inheritance for believers. Furthermore, Christ is now free to marry the Israel of God under the terms of the New Covenant. Thus the law of God is perfectly fulfilled through His life, death and resurrection.

Who Led Israel to the Promised Land?—The 1 Corinthians 10:4 Question

The apostle Paul recounts how Israel came to the Red Sea and was under the cloud and all passed through the sea and all were baptized in the cloud and the sea. The cloud refers to the spiritual presence of *YHWH* in the cloud. “For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Exodus 40:38).

Thus their covenant with *YHWH* took on deep spiritual overtones. With this understanding, we learn that Israel’s baptism was not just a symbolic act of passing through the

¹⁹ W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, 1984, “testator.”

Red Sea, but also that they were indeed immersed in the presence of God. “And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them [Greek *akoloutheo*, meaning the one who precedes], and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). One could argue that the *YHWH* they followed was God the Father, but that would contradict the plain words of the apostle Paul. Also, Paul goes on to say, “...nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted” (verse 9). So he refers to Christ being present with the Israelites *twice* in this Old Testament context.

NEW TESTAMENT SECTION

Neoplatonic, Gnostic and Jewish Concepts of the *Logos*

Influence of Greek Philosophy

The reason for briefly addressing the influence of Greek philosophy and the Jewish concepts of the *Logos* is to show how the terminology came into usage in the Greek world and how it influenced the church fathers in their attempts to explain the oneness of God. “The doctrine of the Logos and the trinity received their shape from Greek Church Fathers, who, if not trained in the schools, were much influenced, directly or indirectly by Platonic philosophy.”²⁰ In *Republic* (716H), Plato states that God is “the beginning, middle and end of all things.”²¹ Plato continually attributed all good to the divine mind. Furthermore, perfection is unified and God is unified and perfect.²² The Neoplatonists used the term *Logos* to represent the universal principle of God’s mind.

Neoplatonism influenced several of the church fathers who attempted to explain the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Neoplatonists attempted to know the ineffable one, the source of all feeling.²³ “Neo-Platonism affirmed there was only one principle and that all reality was derived from it through a series of emanations.”²⁴ As the emanations moved away from the “one principle,” they became more and more inferior. All things good and evil sprung from the same source. Augustine borrowed the Neoplatonist model in explaining the origin of evil. Thus God—or for Augustine, the Trinity—was the one principle, the source of infinite goodness and all things. Evil is not a thing, but a direction away from God.²⁵

Greek philosophy developed the concept of a pervasive universal spirit, to which the creation was attributed. According to William Rusch in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, the Stoics developed the idea of a “completely immanent spirit within creation and the continuing use of spirit as a synonym for deity.”²⁶ Several theologians employed the immanent spirit concept of the Godhead in explaining the idea of essential Trinitarianism.

²⁰ “Platonism and Christianity,” *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1912, p. 91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²² Plato, *Republic* 716H, p. 3.

²³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1 *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, p. 210.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

²⁶ William Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*, 1980, p. 6.

Influence of Gnosticism

Gnosticism also contributed to the development of Trinitarian concepts because of its strict adherence to dualism. Gnostic dualism divided the creation into two spheres—spiritual and physical. Gnostics viewed the spiritual world as good and the physical world as evil. Since God is spirit and good, He could not be the creator of the physical world, they reasoned. The Gnostics claimed that bands of light or lesser spirit beings emanated from God. As these bands of lights moved away from God, eventually all light was lost. Finally, emerging from the darkness is the Demiurge, the prince of darkness, who is responsible for the evil physical creation.

According to the Gnostics, humans possess immortal souls that are clothed in evil flesh. The purpose of human existence is to acquire knowledge that will allow the good immortal souls to traverse through the bands of light (levels of knowledge) back to God (the source of light and knowledge).

The incarnation of the *Logos* posed a great problem for the Gnostics because it made God into flesh, which they viewed as evil. They attempted to explain away God in the flesh by claiming that Jesus was a phantom in human form. Jesus just seemed to be a human being, a belief known as Docetism.

As we shall see, the apostle John refuted the teachings of the Gnostics in his account of the life of Jesus in his Gospel and in his first epistle. John labels those who do not believe that Jesus came in the flesh as Antichrist (1 John 4:2-3). In his gospel, John develops the idea of the incarnation of the *Logos* who came to reveal the Father. Some scholars note that the synoptic writers did not mention the incarnation, apparently implying that John's writings were influenced by the Greek idea of a universal *Logos*. The synoptic Gospels were written before Gnosticism became a major threat to Christianity. We shall also see that John was not an apologist who attempted to reconcile God's inspired revelation of the *Logos* with Philo's or the Greeks' ideas of a universal *Logos*.

The writings of John present the clearest explanation of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. John wrote in the late 90s after Gnosticism had made significant inroads into the Church of God. In his writings, John directly combats the principal tenets of Gnosticism.

In an attempt to make Christianity acceptable in intellectual circles and refute the claims of the Greeks and pagans that Christians were atheists, apologists attempted to reconcile the *Logos* of the Bible with the *Logos* of Greek philosophy. This led to further studies in Christology, which resulted in a more comprehensive doctrine of the Godhead. Trinitarianism eventually came to be the great criterion of orthodoxy.

Jewish Influence

The term *Logos* was used extensively in Jewish and gentile thought. The *Logos* represented not only the spoken word, but also that which was in the mind—thought or reason.

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As noted above, the Greeks used the term in a cosmological sense to describe the “rational principle” that governs all things. As explained below, the Jews used the term to refer to the Word (Hebrew, *Memra of Yehovah*).²⁷

As already noted, the Old Testament presents numerous theophanies in which *YHWH* appears to humans. Furthermore, there are numerous passages in the Old Testament in which God is anthropomorphized. That is, humanlike qualities are ascribed to God. As the years passed, the scribes who were given the responsibility of faithfully preserving and translating the Old Testament began to alter passages that anthropomorphized *YHWH*, generally substituting *Adonai* for *YHWH*. Gradually the Jews developed a mystical view of the name of God, refusing to verbalize it.

According to *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, after the Babylonian captivity the Jewish doctors combined into one view the theophanies, prophetic revelations and manifestations of *YHWH* generally, and united them into one single conception, that of a permanent agent of *YHWH* in the sensible world, whom they designated by the *Memra* (word) of *YHWH*. The learned Jews introduced the idea into the Targums, or Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament, which were publicly read in the synagogues, substituting “the word of *YHWH*” for *YHWH*, each time God manifested Himself.²⁸

The Jewish philosopher and theologian Philo tried to harmonize Greek philosophy with the Bible, and thus used many of the terms that the Greeks use in describing God. Philo states expressly that the totality of ideas is simply the Reason of God as Creator. Yet, on the other hand, they are represented as hypostases distinct from God, individual entities existing independently and apart from Him. Philo regards all individual ideas as comprehended in one highest and most general Idea or Force—the unity of the individual ideas, which he calls the *Logos* or operative agent of God in the world. The *Logos*, therefore, is the highest Mediator between God and the world, the firstborn Son of God, the Archangel who is the vehicle of all revelation, and the High Priest who stands before God on behalf of the world. Through Him the world was created, and so He is identified with the creative Word of God in Genesis chapter 1.²⁹

Thus the concept of the *Logos* or *Memra of Yahweh* appearing as an agent of God and speaking to human beings was a familiar concept among the learned Jews of the first century. Furthermore, Philo had introduced the concept of the *Logos* serving as a mediator between God and man. Thus John uses terminology that was well understood by Jews and gentiles.

Some modern exegetes claim that the Greek word *Logos* merely denotes the reason or spoken word of God, thus embracing rabbinical superstition and Neoplatonism. By accepting rabbinic and philosophical concepts of the *Logos*, they depersonalize the “Word” and reduce Him to God’s reason or spoken word. Furthermore, some exegetes try to build a case for the depersonalization of the *Logos* based on capitalization and referent pronouns. The renowned Bible translator William Tyndale did not capitalize *Logos* in his English translation of the Bible.

²⁷ *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, p. 1593.

²⁸ M.R. Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 2, pp. 26-28.

²⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 11th Edition, Vol. 21, p. 410.

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Moreover, in his translation of John 1:2-5, he used the neuter impersonal pronoun “it” in referring to the *Logos* instead of the personal pronouns “he” and “him.” Thus his translation reads, “All things were made by it, and without it, was made nothing that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in the darkness but the darkness comprehended it not.”

By using the impersonal pronoun “it,” Tyndale fell into the same logical dilemma that exegetes through the centuries have encountered when they attempt to depersonalize the *Logos*. For example, the impersonal pronoun “it” becomes nonsensical if one attempts to translate John 1:12 in the impersonal sense, “But as many as received Him [it], to them He [it] gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” The “Him” of verse 12 is the same “Him” of verse 4, who possesses life and light. The impersonal reason of God does not possess life and light. Christ states that He is “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

The apostle John forcefully rejects the Neoplatonic concept of the *Logos* being only a principle or force that governs the cosmos or that represents only the word or reason of God. John boldly proclaims that the *Logos* was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Thus exegetes who attempt to reduce the *Logos* to an impersonal force must explain how the *Logos* is an impersonal force, yet is made flesh and dies for the sins of the world.

The Biblical Origin of the *Logos*

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John clearly explains the origin of the *Logos*, the being who became Jesus Christ. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Thus in John 1:1, *Logos* is equated with God, yet distinct from God. Translators reversed the last clause from the original Greek to read “and the Word was God.” Three simple clauses of John 1:1 should serve to illustrate the eternal existence of the *Logos* as opposed to a created being:

- a. In the first clause, “In the beginning was the Word,” the Greek $\eta\nu$ or *eeni* means “to be,” “to exist.” The *Logos* existed in the beginning, an obvious allusion to Genesis 1:1—at the very beginning of creation, the *Logos* already existed.
- b. In the second clause, the verb “to be” describes a relationship. That is, the *Logos* was in God’s presence but distinct from God and at the same time in fellowship “with” God. (Greek for “with” is *pros*, a preposition that means “toward,” “to,” “with.” Here it has the concept of “alongside.” *Pros* in this verse is used with the noun for *God*, which is in the accusative case. In defining this preposition, Robertson’s *Word Pictures of the New Testament* says, “*Pros* with the accusative presents a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other.”³⁰)
- c. The verb “to be” in the third clause is used in a predication in which the character or essence of the *Logos* is defined—“and *Theos* was the *Logos*.”³¹

³⁰ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, commentary on John 1:1.

³¹ Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (ed.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 483.

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John clearly identifies two entities, the Word (*Logos*) and God (*Theos*). Furthermore, John forcefully proclaims that the Word was God (*Theos*). Moreover, he asserts that *Logos* had a personal relationship with God. The chronology is emphasized in verses 1 and 2. That is, the Word “was in the beginning with God.” The repetition in verse 2 of the fact that the Word, and none other, was with God in the beginning, emphasizes His presence and relationship with God in eternity and that He did not come into being at the “beginning.”³² If no other scriptures were available, the simplicity and force of these words alone would make it clear that the Word is uncreated and coeternal with God (*Theos*).

John repeats the *Logos*' role in creation in John 1:10 by asserting, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him...” The Greek word *ginomai* that is translated “made” is a primary verb, meaning “to become, to come into existence, to begin to be, to receive being.”³³ The above definition is widely held by scholars. For example, *The Word Biblical Commentary* translation reads, “He was in the world, and the world came into existence through Him.”

But the most dramatic proof of the preexistence of the *Logos* is the declaration that the *Logos* was made flesh and tabernacled (*skenoō*) with humankind (John 1:14). If the *Logos* had no preexistence, then God the Father merely made up a being to become the only begotten Son of God. But as noted above, the Word who existed coeternally with the Father is the one who was made flesh (John 1:1, 14). (For a more detailed analysis of John 1:1, please see Appendix A.)

The *Logos* as the Agent of Creation

The Scriptures clearly reveal the *Logos* as the agent of creation and confirm the preexistence of the one who became Jesus Christ. The apostle John states that the *Logos* was with God in the beginning and that through Him all things were made (John 1:1-3). Moreover, John clearly identifies the *Logos* with Jesus Christ by stating that the *Logos* was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). How could God the Father inspire John to write that the world was made through the *Logos*, if the *Logos* did not exist as a separate being? If no other entity existed with the Father before Jesus was born, why would God proclaim throughout the New Testament that He made everything that was made through the one who became Jesus Christ? If a second entity were not involved, why wouldn't God just simply state that He created all things both in heaven and in earth? Why speak of a second entity, if no such entity existed?

Moreover, if God created the world through His thought or reason before the Son existed, why would He inspire the apostle Paul to equate the Son with the one through whom He made the worlds? Paul states, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Furthermore, in his epistle to the Colossians, Paul writes, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all

³² George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 36, John, 1987, p. 11.

³³ Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson's Publishers, 1999.

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creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:13-17). Thus it is abundantly clear from the Scriptures that the *Logos*, the one who became Jesus Christ, was the agent of creation through whom God made all things.

The Only Begotten Son of God

How did the *Logos* become flesh? According the Gospel of Luke, an angel appears to the virgin Mary and tells her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest [God the Father] will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Mary was overshadowed by the power of the Highest (God the Father).

Furthermore, the Gospel according to Matthew states that as Joseph is contemplating putting Mary away because she was pregnant before he had intercourse with her, an angel appears to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20). Note carefully the proclamation “that which is conceived in her [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit.” In this transitional state, from being in the form of God to being in the form of man, God the Father directed the Holy Spirit in the impregnation of Mary.

The apostle John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). It must be clearly understood at this point that the Father’s impregnation of Mary did not create a divine being. The impregnation of Mary by the Father through the Holy Spirit is the act that caused the Word to be made flesh. As explained earlier, the Word is also the “I AM THAT I AM.”

Jesus is called the only begotten, or uniquely born (Greek *monogenes*) Son of God because of the unique nature of His incarnation. Some exegetes contend that *monogenes* always involves procreation. This position is taken in an attempt to show that Jesus came into existence when the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary.

But in classical and Koine Greek the dominant meaning of *monogenes* is “only” or unique. Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich in their lexicon state that *monogenes* means “only...of children...of an only son. Also unique in kind of something that is the only example of its category... In the Johannine literature *monogenes* is used only of Jesus. The meanings only, unique may be quite adequate for all its occurrences here.”³⁴ Thus, as applied to Jesus, *monogenes* means He is uniquely the “only begotten” Son of God—the only person begotten in such a manner. But this does not mean that Jesus’ existence began at the juncture of His conception. As stated above, He is truly the “I AM THAT I AM.”

³⁴ Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 527.

The *Logos* Empties Himself of Glory

According to the apostle Paul, the plan of salvation existed before God created humankind. “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9). Before time began it had already been determined that the *Logos* would give up His glory so He could reconcile sinful humanity to God and begin a new order of beings. Thus human beings become born sons of God through a resurrection from the dead, of which Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).

Thus the plan of salvation centers on the *Logos* emptying Himself of His glory and taking on the form of flesh so sinful humanity can be reconciled to the Father. Paul makes it very clear that the eternal *Logos* gave up His glory and took on the form of a servant so He could become our Savior. “Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6-8). So it was through the *Logos*’ being willing to give up His glory that He could take on the form of a man.

But the skeptic may ask, do the above verses prove that the *Logos* existed with the Father?

The key word is found in verse 6, “...being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” The Greek word *huparcho* that is translated “being” means “to begin below, to make a beginning, to come forth, hence to be there, be ready, be at hand.”³⁵ Thus the Word existed in eternity, in the form (Greek, *morphe*) of God, and was ready to come forth and take on the form of a man. How could the Word exist in the form of God and not be God? If one accepts Paul’s assertion that He took on the form of a man, one must also accept that He existed in the form of God.

Furthermore, He did not consider it robbery (Greek, *harpagmos*, meaning a thing seized or to be seized) to be equal (Greek, *isos*, meaning equal in quantity or quality) with God. The *Logos* did not “seize equality” with God because it already existed. This equality is in quality. That is, the *Logos* is of the same essence as the Father. But the *Logos* submitted Himself to the Father by humbling Himself and taking on the form of man. Thus the Son is not equal to the Father in authority. In giving up His glory and humbling Himself to take on the form of a human and die on the stake, the *Logos* performed the greatest act of humility the world has ever witnessed. Moreover, His willingness to give up the glory He shared with God the Father and His willingness to become obedient to the point of death are both principal reasons why the Father exalted Him and placed Him over all things (Philippians 2:8-9).

³⁵ Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.

The *Logos* Is Identified as Jesus Christ in Revelation

The book of Revelation records the revelation that the Father gave to Jesus Christ who gave it to an angel, who gave it to John (Revelation 1:1). Thus the book of Revelation records the very revelation of God the Father. John's salutation is from God the Father who was, who is and who is to come and from Jesus Christ the firstborn from the dead (Revelation 1:4-5). Soon after the salutation, John is given a vision of the Son of Man walking among seven golden candlesticks. This one declares that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (Revelation 1:10-17). Thus Jesus Christ equates His eternity with that of God the Father. These passages clearly parallel the "I AM" declaration of Jesus in John 8:58—"Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM'"—thus irrefutably proclaiming coeternity with the Father.

Furthermore, John is given a vision of Jesus Christ coming in glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called *The Word of God*" (Revelation 19:11-13). Here the Father reveals to the entire world that Jesus Christ is "*The Word of God*," the same being who exists with God the Father in eternity. He is the one who emptied Himself of His glory and took on the form of flesh, Immanuel—the incarnate *Word* who died for the sins of the world who is now alive forever more.

Christ's Testimony of Glory He Shared With the Father

Before giving His life for the sins of the world, Jesus asked the Father to restore to Him the glory He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). The force of this request in the Greek language is undeniable. Before the "world" (Greek *kosmos*, meaning the arrangement of the universe) "was" (Greek *einai*, the infinitive form of *eimi* meaning "to be" or to "exist")—before the *kosmos* was created—Christ shared this glory with the Father. Any attempt to dismiss this as prophetic is not in keeping with the clear words of Christ. Why would Christ ask the Father to restore something He had with the Father before the world was, if He never experienced it in the first place? It seems that if He had never experienced this glory, He would have asked the Father to glorify Him with the glory of the Father. Clearly the preexistence of Christ is affirmed in this verse.

It is clear from the Scriptures that Christ came to the earth and gave up the glory He had with the Father before the world came into existence. But now, Jesus who died for the sins of the world has been raised from the dead (glorified) and sits on the right hand of the Father. So the fact that Christ was glorified at the resurrection in no way proves that the *Logos* did not exist in a glorified state before He came to the earth.

Thus we can confidently conclude that the Word emptied Himself of His glory and took on the form of a man. In the flesh He was divine in the sense that He was the *monogenes*, the uniquely born Son of God, filled with the Holy Spirit. In His humility He took on the form of a

man so He could die for the sins of all humankind. He was resurrected from the dead as the Son of God (Romans 1:4), thus paving the way for those who are led by the Spirit of God to become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14-17).

The Testimony of David Is Verified by Christ
“The LORD Said to My Lord, Sit at My Right Hand”

Even though it is difficult in some Old Testament passages to clearly identify the distinctions between God the Father and the *Logos*, there are scriptures that make a clear distinction between God the Father and the one who became Jesus Christ. One of the most obvious passages is Psalm 110:1, “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” Here the *YHWH* is affirming that the Lord (Hebrew *Adon*) of David will sit on the right hand of the Father. Two entities are clearly in view. David speaks of the *YHWH* and the *Adon* in the present tense. David confirms that the *Adon* is his Lord. The *YHWH* then states that the *Adon* is to sit on His right hand until He makes His enemies His footstool. Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus affirmed that He is the *Adon* of Psalm 110:1 when He posed the question to the Pharisees regarding whose Son the Messiah was. “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him “Lord,” saying: “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”? If David then calls Him “Lord,” how is He his Son?’” (Matthew 22:41-45). In the language of our day, Jesus is asking them how David could call *Adon* Lord, if the Christ (the Messiah) is just the son of David. The *NIV Study Bible* states that Jesus’ purpose in quoting Psalm 110:1 was to show that He was more than a descendant of David, He was David’s Lord.³⁶ Moreover, Jesus affirms that He is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus continues, “And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore” (Matthew 22:46). The Pharisees got the point.

So from the above we can see clearly that Psalm 110 identifies two beings called Lord. Furthermore, Psalm 110:5 is one of the 134 locations in the Old Testament where the Masoretes replaced *YHWH* with *Adonai*. (A complete list of these occurrences can be found in Appendix 32 of E.W. Bullinger’s *Companion Bible*.)³⁷ Psalm 110 describes a relationship between two beings. “The LORD [*YHWH*] said to my Lord [*Adon*], ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The LORD [*YHWH*] shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! ...The LORD [*YHWH*] has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’ The Lord [here *Adonai* is substituted for *YHWH*] is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations...” (Psalm 110:1-2, 4-6).

David’s description of *YHWH* sitting at the right hand of *YHWH* is irrefutably what the text states. The Masoretes in their zeal to preserve strict montheism chose to resolve their

³⁶ *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1519.

³⁷ E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913), *The Companion Bible*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1974.

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dilemma by changing *YHWH* in verse 5 to *Adonai*. This latter term could refer to a human lord in addition to being a title for God. This would allow for an alternative explanation to the verse. But in the New Testament, it is made clear that this is a reference to Jesus Christ and not to David or Saul as *Adonai*. Psalm 110 is the most often quoted Old Testament scripture in the New Testament and in every instance it is applied to Christ. He is the *Adonai* of verse 1 and the *YHWH* of verse 5.

The argument is made that the Hebrew in verse 1 is *Adon* and not *Adonai*. This assertion is somehow supposed to prove that the reference in verse 1 is to a human being—and that references to Deity are always *Adonai*. This is a contrived argument. In ancient Hebrew there were no vowel points, thus *Adonai* and *Adon* are exactly the same in ancient Hebrew. When vowel points were added much later by the same Masoretes, they arbitrarily chose which word to use in this verse. Since the Jews feel that this is only referring to a human being they chose *Adon* and not *Adonai*, but there is no basis in fact for this choice, outside of their own interpretation of the verse.

But no matter how one views verse 1, the original text in verse 5 cannot be refuted since it is clear that *YHWH* is at the right hand of someone. In verse 1, *YHWH* is seated with someone at His right hand. Hence the dilemma that the Masoretes tried to fix by changing *YHWH* to *Adonai* in verse 5. However every New Testament reference to Psalm 110 identifies Jesus Christ as the second Lord of verse 1. If He is the “Lord” on the right hand of the Father, then He is clearly called *YHWH* in verse 5.

In Acts 2:32-36 Peter interprets the Lord (Greek *Kurios*) on the right hand of the LORD to be Christ. He clearly shows that David was not speaking of himself, which is the most common Jewish interpretation today. And Hebrews 1:1-13 also identifies this being on the right hand of *YHWH*, who is called *YHWH* in Psalm 110:5, as Christ and not David.

Preexistence of Christ Confirmed by the Priesthood of Melchizedek

The apostle Paul clearly states in Hebrews 5:4-6 that Christ was divinely appointed to the office of Melchizedek, just as Aaron was divinely appointed to the office of high priest (Exodus 28:1). The divine appointment of Christ as a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek dates back to the Old Testament as recorded in Psalm 110:4, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

What is meant by “order of Melchizedek”? The word “order” does not occur often in the Old Testament. The usual meaning given is position or rank, although it is used also in the sense of “for the sake of” (“in regard of,” KJV) in Ecclesiastes 8:2 and “so that” (“to the end that,” KJV) in Ecclesiastes 7:14. In New Testament Greek it appears to be best reflected by “according to the nature of,” or “just like,” with reference not only to the higher rank, but also to the entirely different nature of Melchizedek’s priesthood.³⁸

³⁸ *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 811.

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The Aaronic priesthood is human, corruptible and subject to frailties. Christ is the immortal Son of God who holds the office by divine appointment and is “become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:20). However, according to the law, only a descendant of Aaron, of the family of Levi, could be high priest (Exodus 40:15). Christ was of the line of Judah and legally not eligible for the priesthood. Paul, therefore, must now explain how Christ can occupy an office that was actually promised to another tribe (Numbers 25:13).

The theme of Hebrews 7 is introduced by the last verse of chapter 6. That is, Jesus is “become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The first three verses of chapter 7 echo this concept by showing that Melchizedek is also eternal. “For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God...remains a priest continually.” “Without father, without mother, without descent” (KJV) simply means that He is devoid of any genealogy. Unlike the Aaronic priests, to whom pure family descent was vital (Ezra 2:62), Melchizedek’s birth is never mentioned, neither is His death. Having no beginning, since none is mentioned, He also has no end. In the brief episode of Genesis He only appears as a priest of God and king of Salem.

Paul’s explanation of Christ’s right to occupy the office of high priest centers on the eternal nature of the priesthood of Melchizedek. Paul uses the example of Abraham’s tithing to Melchizedek to show that the priesthood of Melchizedek existed before the Levitical priesthood. This Melchizedek is “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually” (Hebrews 7:3). Paul goes on to explain that while Levi was still in the loins of his father Abraham, Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham. The concept of the eternal nature of the priesthood is emphasized several times in verses 21 and 23-25.

Paul concedes the fact that the Levites were commanded to receive tithes according to the law. But the focus is on the eternal nature of the priesthood of Melchizedek. Paul’s argument then turns to the question of perfection. If perfection could be achieved through the law, then there would be no need for another priest to rise after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11, 19). It should be noted that Paul does not write in a linear pattern. For example, questions or thoughts that are introduced in earlier verses are often times answered later. In verse 11 he asks the question, if perfection could be achieved through the Levitical system, why would there be a need for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek? He doesn’t specifically answer the question of perfection until verse 19.

In verse 12, Paul reasons that because the priesthood has been changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. It should be noted with emphasis that since the priesthood is changed, a change in the law is necessitated. The great question then is, which law? Two major ideas have been introduced in the first few verses of the chapter: 1) the change in the priesthood and 2) the fact that Levi was commanded to receive tithes according to the law.

Now let’s briefly examine this. As we have noted, Paul’s argument for the change in the priesthood centers firstly on the eternal nature of the priesthood of Melchizedek and, secondly,

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on the inability of the Levitical system to bring the worshippers to a state of perfection. Paul notes that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah and thus could not serve in the Levitical priesthood. He notes that the commandment that limits service in the priesthood to the descendants of Levi is a carnal commandment (verses 13-16). Paul continues to develop the argument that Christ has the right to occupy the office because of the power of an endless life and that He has been declared a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:16-17).

Paul then boldly declares that, based on the eternal nature of the priesthood of Melchizedek and on the fact that God by an oath has declared Him to be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, there must be an annulling of the law (Hebrews 7:18). So the law that was changed was the one that limited the priesthood to the descendants of Levi. Moreover, the laws pertaining to sacrifices were changed. The Levites offered daily sacrifices, but Jesus offered one sacrifice for all. Thus, based on the inspired words of the apostle Paul, the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is eternal, having been occupied in Old Testament times by the one who became Jesus Christ and now having been transferred to the Son of God.

Christ's Testimony of His Preexistence

The very words of Christ provide ample evidence of His preexistence before He was made flesh and dwelt among men. Some commentators argue that Jesus did not claim to be God—that His message was entirely about the Father, not about Himself. How does the actual evidence of Scripture square with this contention?

When one compares some of the statements made by Christ of Himself with statements made about *YHWH* in the Old Testament, it becomes obvious that the statements are referring to the same being. Here are a few examples:

- Jesus claims to be judge of all men and nations (John 5:27; Matthew 25:31); the prophet Joel states *YHWH* “will sit to judge the surrounding nations” (Joel 3:12).
- Jesus says, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). Isaiah writes, “The LORD [*YHWH*] will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory” (Isaiah 60:19); and David writes, “The LORD [*YHWH*] is my light” (Psalm 27:1).
- In Isaiah 44:6 *YHWH* states, “I am the First, and I am the Last.” John quotes Jesus in Revelation 1:17 as saying the same thing about Himself—“I am the First and the Last.”
- Zechariah records that *YHWH* will come to the Mount of Olives with His saints. “Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives... Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You” (Zechariah 14:3-5). We know that Jesus Christ will return to this earth with the saints and set foot on the Mount of Olives (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Acts 1:11).

When Jesus healed the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12, He used the words, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” This automatically evoked a reasoning from the scribes that this man was speaking blasphemies because God alone forgives sins. He remarked to the scribes that He said

this “that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” Jesus’ claim to be able to forgive sins and Jesus’ healing of the man are all evidence of His authority and make it clear that Jesus was claiming a power that God alone possessed (see Jeremiah 31:34).

Jesus Was Worshipped (Yet Only God Is to Be Worshipped)

The Old Testament Scriptures forbid worship of anyone except God (Exodus 20:1-5). In the Scriptures we see that men and angels refused to be worshipped. For example: “As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man’” (Acts 10:25-26). Paul and Barnabas at Lystra refused worship of the locals (Acts 14:13-15). Even angels refused worship (Revelation 22:8-9).

Yet Jesus received worship on numerous occasions without rebuking His worshippers. The healed leper worshipped Him (Matthew 8:2). The ruler knelt before Him with his petition (Matthew 9:18). After Jesus had stilled the storm, “those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God’” (Matthew 14:33). The Canaanite woman worshipped Jesus (Matthew 15:25), as did the mother of James and John (Matthew 20:20), the demon-possessed man (Mark 5:6) and the blind man who was healed (John 9:38).

Jesus was even worshipped when He was a baby (Matthew 2:2, 11). And Jesus was worshipped after His resurrection (Matthew 28:17). In John 20:28, Thomas makes the declaration “My Lord and my God!” once he was convinced that it really was Jesus. So there is no question that Jesus was worshipped from His birth to the time He ascended back to heaven. And He is still worshipped today. Thus we see conclusively that He was also God before His human birth. The Word *became* flesh (John 1:14). This begs the question: If He became flesh, what was He before He became flesh? The above testimony of Christ and the apostles shows that He was God prior to becoming flesh, He was God after He became flesh, and He is God after He was resurrected.

The Testimony of Peter

In Peter’s inspired sermon on the Day of Pentecost, he quotes Psalm 16:8-10 and applies it to Jesus Christ. “For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence’” (Acts 2:25-28).

After quoting from Psalm 16, Peter then expounds the meaning of David’s prophecy. Peter asserts that David is dead and buried and his sepulchre is still with them. He further states that David has not ascended into heaven (Acts 2:29, 34). Peter then explains that David was a prophet and that he knew “that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne; he foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:30-32). It

thus becomes abundantly clear that the Messiah would be a son of David after the flesh, but He would also be the Son of God who dies for the sins of the world and is raised to sit on His throne and is now seated on the right hand of the Father in heaven.

God's Purpose for Creating Humankind

Any study of the nature of God that does not examine the purpose of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as it relates to God's great purpose for humanity, would be woefully inadequate. God created humans in His image with regard to form and shape (Genesis 1:26-27). In John's vision of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:13-18, the resurrected Christ is described as having human features. The apostle John writes, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Furthermore, John states in Revelation 22:3-4, "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." Thus to deny that God and the Lamb have form and human features is to deny the inspired words of God.

Even though humans were created in the image of God, they are not of the same essence as God. Adam was created from the dust of the earth. In Genesis 2:7 we read that after he was created in the image of God in the sense of form, God breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul (Hebrew, *nephesh*). It should be noted that God breathed into Adam the breath of life. He did not breathe into Adam any spiritual essence, but rather man became a living soul, *nephesh*—breathing creature.³⁹

The Hebrew word *nephesh* simply means life and/or life potential. Animals were also given life or soul as clearly revealed in Genesis 1:20, "Then God said, 'Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures [*nephesh*], and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.'" The Hebrew word *nephesh* is translated as "life" in several places in the Old Testament. Thus it is clear that *nephesh* refers to life. This is why Jesus instructs us not to fear man who can kill the body but not the soul (life potential), but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hellfire (Matthew 10:28). God is the one who is the ultimate judge as to whether one lives or dies the second death (from which there is no resurrection).

The life that God breathed into Adam's nostrils imparted to him a "physio-chemical" state of existence. In short, it was physical life. This is evidenced by the fact that God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). This instruction to Adam and Eve contains two critically important points: 1) humankind must look to God for the knowledge of good and evil, and 2) disobedience leads to death.

Adam and Eve rejected God's instructions and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They chose to believe Satan's great lie, i.e., "you will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4-5).

³⁹ *New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words.*

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As a result of their disobedience, God cast them out of the Garden of Eden, thus cutting them off from the source of eternal life. “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever’—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Genesis 3:22-23).

Christ the Redeemer

In view of humankind being cut off from the Tree of Life, God in His love and mercy promised humankind a redeemer from the seed of woman. This one would be no ordinary seed of woman since He would bruise the serpent’s head, and the serpent would bruise the heel of the Seed of woman (Genesis 3:15). This Seed of woman is Jesus Christ, the uniquely born Son of God who took on the form of man made according to the flesh. Note how the apostle Paul frames the fulfillment of this prophecy, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Before the foundation of the world, *YHWH* and the *Logos* developed the plan of redemption for humankind. “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained [Greek *proginosko*, know beforehand] before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:18-20). God knew that humankind would sin and thus need a redeemer.

This leads to the great question of why God created humans, knowing that they would sin and need a redeemer. Since God is love, and since love is outgoing concern for someone outside one’s self, it was determined that They would share who They were and what They were with other beings. God and the Word are coeternal, uncreated and of the same essence—God is spirit (John 4:24). They, of course, could create spirit beings as They did with the angelic realm. However, the angels are created spirits. In fact, the angels were created to serve as ministering servants to the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). So how could God share the exact, stamped image of His person, the very ground of His being with others?

The plan called for the creation of humankind made in the image of God, but not of the same essence, since they are physical beings. But knowing that humankind would sin, the Word and the Father developed the great plan of redemption, which would call for the Word becoming flesh, thus showing that the eternal spirit could be joined to flesh. So the Word became the Son of God who came to redeem humankind and reconcile us to God. Jesus’ death made the reconciliation possible. Upon repentance, faith in the sacrifice of Christ, baptism and the laying on of hands, the repentant sinner can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and be thus joined to God (Acts 2:38).

Note how the apostle Paul summarizes this process: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:8-10). Note that God demonstrated or commended (Greek *sunistao*, to place together, to set in the same place, to bring or band together) His love toward us. In commending His love toward us, He provided the means for us to receive the earnest of the Spirit, the down payment on eternal life. “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee [Greek *arrhabon*, down payment, earnest]” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

God’s Purpose for Humanity

This brings us to the heart and core of God’s purpose for humanity. God will raise us from the dead using the same Spirit by which He raised Jesus from the dead. Thus, in the resurrection, we will be of the same essence as the resurrected Christ is now. The resurrected Christ is of the same essence as the Father. He is one with the Father, yet distinct (John 17:20-21). This same distinction between the *Logos* and God the Father existed before the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

In the apostle Paul’s inspired sermon recorded in Acts 13, he states that Psalm 2:7 was fulfilled when Christ was resurrected: “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten [Greek *gennao*, brought you to birth] You’” (Acts 13:33). Furthermore, he equates the resurrection of Christ from the dead with the Hebrew *yalad* (meaning to bring forth) and with the Greek *gennao*. In the physical family both father and mother have distinct roles to perform in the birth process. In the spiritual family, God the Father will bring us forth as His sons through the resurrection from the dead.

In the above paragraphs we see how humankind can be joined to God and receive the down payment on eternal life. We can clearly see that we are now the sons of God, as the apostle Paul eloquently summarizes it in Romans 8:14-16. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons [Greek *huios*, son] of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption [Greek *huiiothesia*, literally, sonship] by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” It is unfortunate that *huiiothesia* was translated “adoption” by the King James translators. Adopted sons have the rights and privileges of children, but adopted children do not come out of the loins of their adopted parents. Since they are not the biological children of the adopted parents, they do not possess the genetic traits of the adopted parents. Believers are given the very essence of God, the Holy Spirit, thus they are in every sense of the word—sons! The same Spirit that is in God is in Christ and is in us. We will inherit the very nature and essence of God, which is more accurately reflected in the word “sonship” rather than the word “adoption.” The apostle Paul clearly states, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

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Since there is one Spirit and as believers the very Spirit of God has made us His children, we have come out of His very being and we are indeed the sons of God. As sons of God, we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). And since the same Spirit that abides in the Father and the Son abides in us, Christ is not ashamed to call us brethren (Romans 8:17; Hebrews 2:11). Furthermore, by the same Spirit that God raised Christ from the dead He will raise us from the dead (Romans 8:11). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead restored the glory that He shared with the Father before He took on the form of a man. In His glorified state, He is now a “life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Those who have received the earnest of the Spirit and remain faithful until the cessation of human life will also share in His glory and become spirit beings on the God plane. “And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:49, KJV).

“One” (Greek *Heis/Hen*) God in the New Testament

The Greek word *heis* is usually translated “one” in the New Testament. However, *Strong’s Concordance* assigns the same number (1520) to both the masculine form *heis* and neuter form *hen* (a different number is assigned to the feminine form *mia*). Since these forms convey different meanings, one must determine whether *heis* or *hen* is used in a particular verse. In John 10:30, Jesus declares, “I and my Father are one.” The Interlinear Transliterated Bible notes that *hen* is used in John 10:30.⁴⁰

The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible states that “the masc. *heis* must be distinguished from the neuter *hen*. *Heis* means numerically one while *hen* means one in essence as in John 10:30; ‘I and My Father are one,’ *hen*, in essence although they are two different personalities. If the Greek word in this verse were *heis*, it would have denoted one person.”⁴¹

Barnes’ Notes states that “the word translated ‘one’ is not in the masculine, but in the neuter gender. It expresses union, but not the precise nature of the union. It may express any union, and the particular kind intended is to be inferred from the connection.”⁴² Furthermore, in his analysis of John 10:30 Winkie Pratney notes that the Greek word translated as “one” here is “not *heis*, which is masculine, but *hen*, which is neuter; not one person, but one substance, one essence.”⁴³

An erroneous application of *heis* could lead one to conclude that Christ and the Father are numerically one person or being. Clearly, Jesus’ statement in John 10:30 shows that there are two beings unified as “one.” The Father was in heaven and Christ was on earth. The Jews realized the divine unity that was described—no one can be snatched out of Christ’s hand (verse 28), therefore no one can be snatched out of the Father’s hand (verse 29). After He makes these statements, the Jews took up stones to stone Him. When He asked them why they were stoning Him, they replied, “Because You, being a Man, make Yourself God” (John 10:31-33).

⁴⁰ *The Interlinear Transliterated Bible*.

⁴¹ *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*.

⁴² Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the Old and New Testaments*.

⁴³ Winkie Pratney, *The Nature and Character of God*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988, p. 354.

Some exegetes quote 1 Corinthians 8:6 in an attempt to try to prove a unitarian view of God, that is, there is no being in the Godhead except God the Father. “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him” (1 Corinthians 8:6, KJV). In reality, Paul is stating just the opposite. As we have already noted from the clearly spoken words of John 10:30, Jesus Christ and the Father are one. Yet as Paul states, they are distinct personalities. If there is only “one God, the Father,” does this exclude Jesus as a member of the Godhead? If we invert the question we can readily see the folly of the argument. If Jesus is the only “Lord,” does that mean the Father is never the “Lord”? The answer is obvious. Jesus calls the Father “Lord” in Matthew 11:25, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.”

Jesus’ discourse on Psalm 110:1 plainly applies the name *YHWH* to the Father. Furthermore, to argue that Jesus is not included in the “oneness” of God is to deny that He is the Son of God. “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23).

Trinitarian View of the “Oneness” of God

The classic orthodox Trinitarian position states that in the being of the one eternal God there are three eternal and essential distinctions—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—yet no separation. In Western Christendom (Catholic Church) the classical formula has been three persons in one substance; in Eastern Christendom (Greek Orthodox Church) three hypostases (distinctions in being) in one being. Some exegetes deny that there are distinct persons in the Godhead since persons can indicate separate beings. Some assert that the Son of God is not a separate being since He is the radiance of God’s glory (Hebrews 1:3).

Is this assertion true? Moreover, some assert that the phrase “express image of His person” proves that the Son is a hypostasis of God—or a way of being God. Thus they try to prove that spirit is indivisible and that there can be only one being in the Godhead. The validity of each assertion will be examined below.

Joseph Thayer defines *hypostasis* (hypostasis) as a setting or placing under a thing; that which has “foundation, is firm; a substance; real being; the substantial quality; nature of a person or thing.”⁴⁴

One can readily see that *hypostasis* has a wide range of meaning. Theologians contend that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in “hypostatic union” with the Father eternally begetting the Son and the Father and Son generating the Holy Spirit through a process called “passive spiration.” Yet Christ Himself states in John 5:26, “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.” Thus, it is clear that the Father and Son exist independently, yet they are joined by the same essence—the Holy Spirit.

So what does Hebrews 1:3 actually reveal about the relationship of the Son to the Father? Does this verse show that there is only one person in the Godhead, yet three ways of being God?

⁴⁴ Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.

Let's examine the verse, "Who [the Son] being the brightness [*apaugasma*, reflected brightness] of His [the Father's] glory [*doxa*, dignity, glory, honor, praise, worship] and the express image [*charakter*, stamped image] of His person [*hupostasis*, placing under, foundation, substance], and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This verse is not stating that the Son is merely a hypostasis of God or a way of being God—quite the opposite. As Paul wrote in Colossians 2:9, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." A definite distinction is being made between the Father and Son, and at the same time, it is clearly stated that the Son reflects the opinion and character of the Father and is of the same substance.

The above discussion can lead to many other questions. For example, did God give His only begotten Son (born-from-above Son) or did He play games with "His ways of being" and give a hypostasis of Himself? If He only gave a hypostasis of Himself, why all the talk about giving His only begotten Son? If He only gave a hypostasis of Himself, He merely gave Himself to Himself. But the Scriptures declare that Jesus offered up Himself to God (Hebrews 7:27; 9:14).

On the stake, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). If God and Jesus are one being, did God forsake Himself or only a hypostasis of Himself? Just before Jesus died, He also said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). If Jesus were only a hypostasis of God, why would He have needed to commit His spirit into the hands of God?

Furthermore, if one insists that the Son is merely a hypostasis of the Father, and that the Father and Son are not distinct beings, they are hopelessly trapped in a contradiction when it comes to explaining the incarnation of the Word and the crucifixion. Such a position demands the incarnation of "all three ways of being God." Moreover, it demands the death of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the cross. The alternative is to try to make Jesus into mere flesh, a man—not the Son of God who died on the cross—thus denying that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come in the flesh. Such a position is the spirit of Antichrist (1 John 4:3).

Moreover, if one insists on "strict" monotheism, he is forced to conclude that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit died on the cross, since the Trinity doctrine allows for no separation of persons. The doctrine calls for mutual interpenetration of the persons of the Godhead, so that although each person is distinct in relation to the others, nevertheless, each participates fully in the being of the others. So either way the Trinitarian wants to explain it (the notion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit being indivisible either as persons or in hypostatic union), the same contradiction that was noted earlier concerning the incarnation persists. Thus, both positions are guilty of Patripassionism, that is the death of the Father on the cross. Such a position is frightful to say the least.

The Son Is the Express Image of the Father

The Son's reflection of the radiance of God as a distinct entity is further illustrated by the clear biblical teaching that all the resurrected sons of God will reflect the radiance of God. Christ

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prayed that the saints “be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory” (John 17:22, 24). In fact, Spirit-led Christians are possessors and reflectors of God’s glory, light and brightness even in this life (2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:29-30; Matthew 5:16).

Do Spirit-led Christians cease to be separate persons as they reflect the glory of God? Will the resurrected saints lose their separate identity as they are partakers of God’s glory with the Son? The answer is a resounding no! Just as Spirit-led Christians have their own identity now, so will they have their own identity in the glorified state. Note what the apostle John writes in Revelation 22:3-4, “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.” These verses clearly show us that the resurrected saints will have distinct “foreheads” with God’s name written on them. Thus they have a spirit body and distinct features that identify them.

Any teaching on the nature of God must not obscure the precious truth that God can extend Himself to humans through His Spirit. Each Spirit-led Christian becomes a partaker of the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). God and Christ, through the Holy Spirit, abide in believers (John 14:23). They are joined to the Father and the Son. There is no spiritual separation between them and God. Yet they are individual persons, just as the Son of God is a separate person yet joined to the Father, and one with the Father, through the Holy Spirit. After they are resurrected the saints will also have life within themselves (1 Corinthians 15:42-54).

Christ as the Beginning of the Creation of God

Some exegetes claim that Revelation 3:14 proves that Jesus Christ is a created being since Christ is identified in this verse as “the Beginning of the creation of God.” Earlier in the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ states, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last” (Revelation 1:11). So is John now denying the eternity of the Word, the one who was made flesh and dwelt among us, by stating that Christ is the beginning of the creation of God?

As noted in the section “Biblical Origin of the *Logos*,” the *Logos* was made flesh and emptied Himself of His glory and humbled Himself to death on the cross. As Jesus was dying on the stake, He cried out, “‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46). Thus Jesus did not resurrect Himself from the dead—His spirit returned to the Father. Then three days and three nights later God the Father raised Him from the dead and He became the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).

Paul explains in Colossians 1:18 that Christ “is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” He is the firstborn son in the family of God—and as the firstborn, He has the preeminence by being the first of the sons of God. This family is now comprised of sons of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14-17). The Greek word *arche* that is translated “beginning” in Revelation 3:14 means: 1) beginning, origin; 2) the person or thing that commences; the first person or thing in a series, the leader.⁴⁵ Thus Jesus Christ is the first of the sons of God to have

⁴⁵ Online Bible.

experienced the spiritual birth process that brings one into a family relationship with the Father. He is our leader and the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

Furthermore, the Greek for “beginning,” *arche*, can also indicate “that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause.”⁴⁶ *Arche* can also denote a “ruler” or “high [*arche*] priest.” Notice other translations of this verse: “the origin of God’s creation” (NRSV), “the origin of all that God has created” (TEV), “the source of God’s creation” (NAB), “the ruler of God’s creation” (NLT). This type of translation is consistent with Colossians 1:16, “all things were created through Him.”

Christ and the Comforter

The fact that Christ said He would send another Comforter does not mean that the Holy Spirit is a separate entity. God is spirit. So the very essence of God is spirit. Furthermore God and Christ dwell in us through Their essence—the Holy Spirit. In order for this wonderful gift to be made available to humans, reconciliation for sin had to be made. Christ had to be crucified and resurrected—so we could be reconciled to the Father by the death of His Son and saved by His life (Romans 5:10). Christ said that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in Christ’s name (John 14:23, 26). At times the Holy Spirit is associated with the name of the Father and at times with the name of Christ. “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Romans 8:9-10). So it is clear that the Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit can be associated with the name of Jesus Christ.

In 1 John 2:1, the Advocate (Greek *Parakletos*) is equated with the resurrected Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father who ever lives to make intercession for us. The apostle Paul writes, “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17). John writes, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). Thus one can also clearly see that the Holy Spirit (*Parakletos*) is not separate from Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is shed on believers through Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5-6). So the Scriptures clearly reveal to us that the Holy Spirit is sent to us from the Father through Christ. Moreover, this shows that the Holy Spirit is not an entity to itself—it is the essence of the Father and Christ and comes to us through Their direction.

Biblical View of the “Oneness” of God

“God is Spirit” (John 4:24). Spirit is the essence of God. God is uncreated and eternal. According to John 1:1, both God and the Word are uncreated and coeternal. Moreover, They are of the same spiritual essence (Hebrews 2:11). There is one spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4). The spirit that is in the Father is the same spirit that is in Christ and is the same spirit that is in believers. “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into

⁴⁶ Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*.

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one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

In Romans 8:9 Paul associates the Holy Spirit with the names of God and Christ by stating, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” In this verse the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are referenced. Yet as noted above, there is one Spirit, yet there can be thousands of people joined to God and Christ and each other through the Holy Spirit, which is the essence of God and Christ. This is why the apostle Paul could boldly proclaim, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:5). Thus the Holy Spirit is not a person—a separate and distinct entity that acts apart from God and Christ. The Holy Spirit is the life essence and power of God and Christ. Through it, God imparts life and spiritual understanding to the believer.

The apostle Paul beautifully summarizes this spiritual unity: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren [Greek *adelphos*, brother]” (Hebrews 2:11). In this verse a familial relationship is established between Christ and believers. If we are all of one, and if we are brothers of Christ, then we can only conclude, as the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:17, that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

On the night before Christ was crucified, He prayed that the Father, Son and believers would all be made one, “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:19-21). The plain words of Christ in the above passage clearly reveal that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. He prays that believers also become one with Them. This “oneness” as explained above is not a Trinitarian construct, but a spiritual unity whereby God, Christ and believers are all one through the Holy Spirit, the very essence of God.

Conclusion

The subject of the nature of God and Christ is an expansive one and more could be written. When John spoke of things that Christ had done, he stated: “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen” (John 21:25). As clearly shown in this study, God and the Son are coeternal with the Son preexisting in eternity as the Word before His incarnation (John 1:1). God and the Son are of the same essence, the Spirit of God (John 4:24). God the Father, the Son and Spirit-filled sons of God are united through that one Spirit (Romans 8:11, 14-17; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Thus, the Godhead is not a closed Trinity, nor an absolute unity of only one God, but a dynamic family unity that allows for Spirit-born believers to become the very children of God. John summarizes this when he says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Paul also

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states, “And if children, then heirs—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:17).

Appendix A

An Analysis of John 1:1

As noted in the study paper, John 1:1 can be divided into three phrases. After the first phrase, which begins with “in the beginning,” the other two phrases both begin with the Greek *kai* (and). If we write these three phrases out in Greek with the English alongside, we have the following:

1. εν {IN [THE]} αρχη {BEGINNING} ην {WAS} ο {THE} λογος {WORD,}
2. και {AND} ο {THE} λογος {WORD} ην {WAS} προς {WITH} τον {THE} θεον {GOD,}
3. και {AND} θεος {GOD} ην {WAS} ο {THE} λογος {WORD.}

Let’s look at each of these phrases and ask what John was trying to tell us about Jesus Christ. Remember, he was writing the story of Christ.

In the first phrase a simple and straightforward statement is made. “In the beginning was the Word.” The phrase *en arche* is timeless when used with a verb in the imperfect tense. The Greek word for “was” (*en*) is the imperfect of *eimi* (to be or to exist). This phrase can be written as “When all things began, the Word already was” (New English Bible). The imperfect tense denotes a continuous action or a past action. The context helps determine which is intended. In this case, connecting the term with the beginning simply states that whatever you call the beginning, the Word was already in existence. It is another way of expressing eternity.

The second phrase presents a relationship between the Word and the God (*Theos*). Here we have the phrase *pros ton Theon*. This phrase is found 20 times in the New Testament and it is most commonly translated “toward God” or “to God,” but it is also translated “with God” and “against God.” A few examples of this phrase:

John 13:3: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God [*pros ton Theon*].”

Acts 4:24: “So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God [*pros ton Theon*]...”

Acts 12:5: “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God [*pros ton Theon*]...”

Acts 24:16: “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God [*pros ton Theon*] and men.”

Romans 5:1: “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God [*pros ton Theon*] through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Corinthians 3:4 “And we have such trust through Christ toward God [*pros ton Theon*].”

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Revelation 13:6: “Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God [*pros ton Theon*], to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.”

We see that in these passages the phrase indicates interaction between two. Why would it be any different here in John 1? The Greek word *pros* is a preposition that connects two objects. The Word is connected to the God (*ton Theos*). In what way can this be understood? An inanimate thought doesn't have a relationship nor does it have action “toward” or “with” God. *Pros* is the origin of another Greek word, *prosopon*, which has the idea of “face-to-face” or “to look upon one's face.” Another way of looking at the phrase *pros ton Theos* is “beside God.”

The Language of the New Testament has this to say about the translation of *pros* as “with”: “With the accusative *pros* means *to, unto* (when motion is indicated by the verb), *at, with* (when no motion is indicated).”⁴⁷

In John 1:1 the Greek preposition *pros* is translated “with” in most English translations. It is translated “with” 43 times in the New Testament (KJV). Some examples of this usage are:

Matthew 13:56: “And His sisters, are they not all with [*pros*] us? Where then did this Man get all these things?”

Matthew 26:55: “In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, ‘Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with [*pros*] you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me.’”

Mark 14:49: “I was daily with [*pros*] you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.”

In John 1:1 *pros* is in the accusative case. Here is a comment from the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* on the Greek word *pros*:

The preposition “with” in the phrase “the Word was with God” indicates both equality and distinction of identity along with association. The phrase can be rendered “face to face with.”⁴⁸

Arndt and Gingrich Greek-English New Testament Lexicon has a rather long section on this preposition. Here is an excerpt under the accusative case portion:

7. by, at, near; be (in company) with someone. Mt 13:56; Mk 6:3; 9:19a; 14:49; Lk 9:41; J 1:1f; 1 Th 3:4; 2 Th 2:5; 3:10; 1J 1:2. διαμένειν Ac 10:48 D; Gal 2:5b. πμμένειν 1:18; 1 Cor 16:7. καταμένειν 16:6. μένειν Ac 18:3 D. παρει ναι 12:20; 2 Cor 11:9; Gal 4:18, 20.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Eugene Van Ness Goethius, *The Language of the New Testament*.

⁴⁸ Frank E. Gæbelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

⁴⁹ *Arndt and Gingrich Greek-English New Testament Lexicon*.

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The third phrase is possibly the most troubling for people. Those who want to see the Word as inanimate and without form or separateness see this phrase differently. They see the anarthrous noun *Theos* as being quality or character and not referring to a separate being. In other words, the unitarian translates this phrase “the word was divine.” By substituting “divine” for God they declare that Christ was not really God, but only like God, or godly in character. But is this what the phrase is actually saying?

The phrase reads *kai theos en ho logos*. In English the phrase is translated as “The Word [*ho logos*] was [*en*] God [*theos*]. The controversy comes from the term “*theos*” without an article. The Greek for God (*Theos*) does not have an article and is therefore referred to as anarthrous. Articles are very important in Greek and the absence of the article is also seen as significant.

In 1933 Greek scholar Ernest Cadman Colwell wrote a celebrated article for the prestigious *Journal of Biblical Literature*. His work and conclusions have been widely accepted since that time, although in recent years there have been questions and his “rule” has been reexamined. At this juncture it should be helpful to state Colwell’s original rule.

[The data I present] show that a predicate nominative, which precedes the verb, cannot be translated as an indefinite or a “qualitative” noun solely because of the absence of the article; if the context suggests that the predicate is definite, it should be translated as a definite noun in spite of the absence of the article.⁵⁰

As one can easily discern, Colwell’s Rule leaves considerable doubt as to how to interpret such phrases. So, it isn’t an open-and-shut case for either side. Colwell simply established that when a predicate nominative precedes the verb (as in the case with *theos en ho logos*) it doesn’t require that there be a definite article. In other words *theos* without the article does not deny it being a definite noun, that is a person as opposed to a quality (indefinite noun).

In order to solve this problem, one can look at the use of *theos* in the writings of John (or in the entire New Testament for that matter). John uses *theos* 84 times in the Gospel of John. If John 1:1 is excluded for the sake of discussion, it becomes apparent that John never uses *theos* to refer to quality or character. He always uses it in reference to a being called *Theos*. There are other occasions where *Theos* is anarthrous, but would not be considered as an indefinite noun. While grammatically the use of *theos* without the article leaves the door open for some speculation, taken as a whole no other translation but “God” makes sense in this verse. One translation by the Jehovah’s Witnesses places the word “a” before the word “god” in John 1:1. This is purely interpretative on their part and not accepted by the vast majority of translators, since the indefinite article is not a part of Greek grammar.

If John desired to attribute mere godliness to the Word, he could have chosen the Greek adjective *theios*. This word is found three times in the New Testament and is translated “Godhead” once and “divine” twice (Acts 17:29; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:4). If John wanted to describe the Word as “godly” or “divine,” he could have chosen *theios*; but he chose the Greek *Theos*.

⁵⁰ Ernest Cadman Colwell, “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1933, p. 21.

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Many scholars share the simple interpretation of John 1:1 that Jesus Christ is truly God and was God in the flesh when He walked this earth. These scholars are Trinitarian in their beliefs, and although we do not agree with the Trinity, we reach the same conclusion about John 1:1 as they do. Here is a summary list (which is not exhaustive) of the scholars and their writings where this view is expounded:

1. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., F.W. Gingrich and Frederick Danker, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 719.
2. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1932), 5:4.
3. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), p. 53.
4. A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 767-768.
5. A.T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 67-68.
6. H.E. Dana and Julius Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950), pp. 148-149.
7. Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 3, "Golden Nuggets," p. 52.
8. A.M.R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 384.
9. F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 31.
10. W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 1:684.
11. E.C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1933, pp. 12-21.
12. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 77.
13. Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns Mark 15:39 and John 1:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, March 1973, 92:75-87.
14. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), Vol. 3:105-106.
15. F.F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), pp. 60-61.
16. A.E. Knoch, *Concordant Literal New Testament* (Santa Clarita, California: Concordant Publishing Concern, 1978).

Appendix B

An Analysis of *Echad* and the Phrase “Is One”

The phrase “is one” is used 13 times in the King James Version of the Old Testament. In each case, the same Hebrew phrase is used except where “is one” is only implied in the original text. An examination of how this phrase is used in the Old Testament will help to determine whether the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 can refer to more than one being, united in purpose and spirit, or whether it limits God to one personality (ultimate reality). Does it denote singularity or does it denote a collection of beings or things that are “one”?

1. Genesis 2:24: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” In this case two persons become one flesh.
2. Genesis 11:6: “And the LORD said, Behold, the people [is] one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.” In this occurrence of the phrase, it refers to a collective whole—a group of people united in mind and purpose.
3. Genesis 41:25: “And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh [is] one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he [is] about to do.”
4. Genesis 41:26: “The seven good kine [are] seven years; and the seven good ears [are] seven years: the dream [is] one.” In the above verse and this verse, two separate dreams are interpreted to mean an expression of unity of purpose.
5. Exodus 2:6: “And when she had opened [it], she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This [is one] of the Hebrews’ children.” As the brackets indicate, the phrase “is one” is not in the original text, thus this passage is not applicable.
6. Leviticus 7:7: “As the sin offering [is], so [is] the trespass offering: [there is] one law for them: the priest that maketh atonement therewith shall have [it].” In this verse the phrase is used in a singular sense, although it could be argued that the law is made up of many elements.
7. Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [is] one LORD.” To the Jews, verse 4 is not only an assertion of monotheism; it is also an assertion of the numerical oneness of God contradictory to the Christian view of the Trinity of the Godhead. This kind of oneness, however, runs contrary to the use of *echad* in the sense of a unity made up of several parts. In Exodus 26:6, 11, the 50 gold clasps are used to hold the curtains together so that the tent would be united, *echad*. Ezekiel said that the LORD directed him to join two sticks to represent Judah and Ephraim, for He was going to make the two kingdoms one, i.e., a single nation made of two parts (Ezekiel 37:17, 19, 22). This Jewish view of oneness also contradicts those statements in Scripture that clearly reveal a distinction between God the Father and the Son.
8. Judges 21:6: “And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.” In this verse, the phrase refers to a collective noun that allows for more than one person or being.
9. Esther 4:11: “All the king’s servants, and the people of the kings’ provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, [there is] one law of his to put [him] to death, except

- such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.” In this case, the phrase is apparently referring to a singular law that called for the execution of individuals entering the king’s court without his permission.
10. Job 9:22: “This [is] one [thing], therefore I said [it], He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.” Job summarized the accusations that were voiced in verses 14 to 21. Thus this statement is referring to unity of purpose, not a single thing.
 11. Ecclesiastes 4:8: “There is one [alone], and [there is] not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet [is there] no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither [saith he], For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This [is] also vanity, yea, it [is] a sore travail.” This could refer to the futility of persons (collective) who are never satisfied.
 12. Ecclesiastes 9:2: “All [things come] alike to all: [there is] one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as [is] the good, so [is] the sinner; [and] he that sweareth, as [he] that feareth an oath.”
 13. Ecclesiastes 9:3: “This [is] an evil among all [things] that are done under the sun, that [there is] one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness [is] in their heart while they live, and after that [they go] to the dead.” “One event” (death) is used in the collective sense to indicate good and evil men are all subject to death.

Conclusions: The phrase “is one” occurs 13 times in the Old Testament. Eight times the phrase could be applied in the collective sense. Three times singularity is implied. Twice the phrase was not applicable since it is not in the original Hebrew manuscripts. It is quite apparent that the Hebrew usage of this word was not limited to denoting singularity.

Moreover, it should be noted that the Hebrew word *echad* can be used as a cardinal, ordinal and distributive number as well as an indefinite article. Botterweck in his *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* states:

The numerical ‘*echad*, “one,” begins the series of ordinary numbers. It is an adjective. It can be used as a cardinal, ordinal, and distributive number. In prose literature from the time of Solomon, it already appears as an indefinite article. As a numerical adjective and adverb it takes on meanings such as “only,” “unique,” “prominent,” “alone,” “same, uniform,” “entire, undivided.” As an element in various expressions, its use is even wider (cf. English “as one man,” “all one,” “one with”). There are other Hebrew words which are closely related to ‘*echad*, and partially used interchangeably with it: “alone,” *yachadh*, “union, all together,” “only, alone, solitary,” *lebhadh*, “alone,” *rishon*, “the first.”⁵¹

Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon has this to say about the Hebrew word *echad*:

⁵¹ Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, p. 176.

It can mean the same, as in the “same night” (Genesis 40:5). It can also be used in the ordinal sense, as in the first day of the month, but this is only used in counting the days of the month in the Old Testament. It can be used as an indefinite article to refer to one or more individuals. It can also mean one only of its kind, as used in Job 23:13. Here again, it shows singleness of mind rather than limiting God to one Being.⁵²

As one can readily observe from the exhibit below, the use of the Hebrew word *echad* goes far beyond that of a cardinal number. Section E gives an example where it is used in the distributive sense, while section F gives examples of its being used in the collective sense. Thus Deuteronomy 6:4 should be understood in the collective sense in order for it to be in harmony with the rest of the Bible, especially Christ’s statements in the New Testament. And finally, Section G gives an example of the word being used for more than one entity, demonstrating unity of mind and spirit, especially in the example of the lion and the lamb feeding together.⁵³

Exhibit 1

(From Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament, page 28)

“Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

In the examples below, the bolded word or words are transliterated from the Hebrew word *echad*.

A. The same

“And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in **one** night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which [were] bound in the prison” (Genesis 40:5).

B. The first (used only in counting the days of the month)

“And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the **first** day of the first month” (Ezra 10:17).

C. As an indefinite article

1. “And, behold, there came **a** prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I [am] the LORD” (1 Kings 20:13).
2. Then I heard **one** saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain [saint] which spake...” (Daniel 8:13).

⁵² Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 28.

⁵³ Ibid.

3. “Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into **some** pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams” (Genesis 37:20).

D. One only of its kind

1. “But he [is] in **one** [mind], and who can turn him? and [what] his soul desireth, even [that] he doeth” (Job 23:13).
2. “Thus saith the Lord GOD; An evil, an **only** evil, behold, is come” (Ezekiel 7:5).

E. One after the other—distributive

“But Moses’ hands [were] heavy; and they took a stone, and put [it] under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the **one** on the one side, and the **other** on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun” (Exodus 17:12).

F. Both alike

1. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be **alike** good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).
2. “Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, **one** carrying three kids, and **another** carrying three loaves of bread, and **another** carrying a bottle of wine...” (1 Samuel 10:3).

G. Unity of mind and spirit

“The wolf and the lamb shall feed **together**, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat” (Isaiah 65:25).

Appendix C

Use of Plural Terms in the Old Testament

Even though there are numerous extrabiblical sources that support the idea of plurality when referring to God, what do we find in our own search of the Scriptures? A brief survey of the Hebrew Scriptures confirms that the Bible often refers to God in plural terms.

In the book of Genesis we are introduced to God as *Elohim*. This Hebrew noun is found 2,605 times in the Old Testament. Of those, 2,366 times it is simply translated as “God.” But it is translated as “gods” 216 times; “god’s” seven times; “judges” four times; “goddess” two times; “great” two times; “mighty” two times; “angels” one time; “exceeding” one time; “godward” one time; “godly” one time; “judge” one time; and “very” one time.

The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDBG) offers a simple explanation for this Hebrew word. Plurality is not denied.

Plural of 0433 [*eloah*]. Noun, masculine. 1. Plural. a. rulers, judges; b. divine ones; c. angels; d. gods. 2. Plural intensive—singular meaning. a. god, goddess; b. godlike one; c. works or special possessions of God; d. the (true) God; e. God.⁵⁴

Clearly *Elohim* can be used in the singular, even with plural pronouns, but it is most curious that with a perfectly acceptable singular form available to use (*Eloah*) Moses and others used the plural form on so many occasions.

In the book of Genesis we have three distinct references to God that use plural pronouns. These are Genesis 1:26, 3:22 and 11:6-7. Theologians offer various explanations for these unusual references. Some claim that these are figures of speech, while others employ the idea of “plural of majesty” (*pluralis majestaticus*). This theory asserts that whenever you have a king or royal figure he may speak in the plural (“we” or “our”) even though there is no plurality. This theory is based on the idea of the greatness of the one speaking. Another theory suggests that God was including the created realm (angels, cherubim, etc.) in His assertion “us” or “we.” This is actually similar to the “plural of majesty” in that the court of the king or royal person is being included in the plural references.

These are only theories, which do not adequately answer the question. Moses chose a plural term when speaking of God, and he also used plural pronouns on three different occasions. Why? One answer that should not be excluded is that there was more than one being in the Godhead at the time of creation (“Us” and “Our”). The most famous Jewish scholar from the Middle Ages, Moses ben Maimonides, confesses an inability to explain this plurality, so he suggests that the plural pronouns should be dropped from the text. Of course he couldn’t do this, but in his “Thirteen Articles of Faith” he does change the Hebrew *echad* (which is used in Deuteronomy 6:4) to *yachid*. The original text (*echad*) allows for a unit where more than one

⁵⁴ Francis Brown, Edward Robinson, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993.

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thing can be called one (“two became one”), so when Maimonides quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 in his articles, he uses *yachid* which means “only one.”⁵⁵ This clearly shows his desire to remove any possibility of there being plurality in the Godhead. Maimonides is considered by many to be the greatest of all Jewish scholars and an equal with the biblical writers. Here is a quote from Maimonides scholar Shlomo Pines that appeared in *Time* magazine:

Maimonides is the most influential Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages, and quite possibly of all time.⁵⁶

The idea of “plural of majesty” has another serious problem that must be addressed if it is to be accepted as the final answer. One cannot point to any other place in Scripture where this is used of God speaking in the first person. There is absolutely no proof that this was commonly used in the ancient Hebrew. The only example that one can reference is found in Daniel 2:36 where Daniel says “we” will interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, when he alone did the interpreting. The biblical evidence is extremely weak that this is a valid explanation of the plural pronouns in Genesis. Evidence shows that the Jewish scholar Gesenius developed this theory during the 19th-century debates between unitarians and Trinitarians. In his book titled *Phanerosis* John Thomas writes of Gesenius’ efforts to refute the idea of plurality in the Godhead:

Grammarians tell us that there is nothing in it: that it is only a poetical fancy, or a peculiarity of style, that caused the singular to be used at all; and that the plural is used as more becoming, being expressive of the majesty or excellency of God. Referring to this Gesenius says, “In unison with Aramaean usage the form of the singular is employed only in the poetic style and the later Hebrew; while the *pluralis majesticus vel excellentie* is the common and very frequent form.”⁵⁷

Gesenius offers no support for this argument and he cannot point to any examples in Scripture where this is used of God (outside of the three in question). The simplest answer is that Moses under inspiration used the plural pronouns to refer to God. He wasn’t referring to the “majestic heavenly court” since they were not the creator. Man was not made in the image of the “majestic court” (angels, cherubim or seraphim) but in the image of God. Neither can we find support for Moses wanting to make the point of the greatness of God by using plural pronouns. This case falls apart when you consider that Moses used singular pronouns when referring to God in many other places. Rather than supporting the singularity argument, these examples actually make the case that Moses wasn’t using plural pronouns to show the greatness or majesty of God. If so, then he would have continued to use plural pronouns.

Numerous authors point out the confusion over the use of the term *elohim*. One author writes: “Elohim (God; gods; Heavenly Father) is the plural form of the singular noun ‘eloah’ (compare Arabic Allah) in the Hebrew Bible, where it is used 2,570 times as compared to 57

⁵⁵ Moses Maimonides and Avraham Yaakov Finkel, *The Essential Maimonides: Translations of the Rambam*; Jason Aronson Publishers, 1996.

⁵⁶ As quoted by Richard Ostling, “Honoring the Second Moses,” *Time*, Dec. 23, 1985.

⁵⁷ John Thomas, *Phanerosis*, located at Web site: www.antipas.org/books/phanerosis.

times for its singular. But as one commentator has noted, why this ‘plural form for “God” is used has not yet been explained satisfactorily.’”⁵⁸

After Genesis 1:26 we have three more examples of plural pronouns associated with God (*Elohim*) in the Old Testament. They are Genesis 3:22, Genesis 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8. We see that different authors—Moses and Isaiah—use plural pronouns. What can we learn from these four examples? Why would the authors from the Old Testament choose to use a plural pronoun with the plural form of God (*Elohim*) when the option of a singular pronoun with a singular form for God (*Eloah*) was conveniently available? It must be made clear that in the majority of cases the term *Elohim* is used as a “plural intensive—with a singular meaning.”⁵⁹ But this “singular meaning” in the majority of cases does not negate the plurality that exists as well, nor does it explain the use of the plural pronouns. This was the dilemma that Maimonides struggled with, but he never came to a good solution.

Peter Hayman in his article “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991) explains that it isn’t just in plural pronouns that we see the plurality of God, there are also several instances where plural verbs and plural adjectives are used with *Elohim*. The following paragraphs are from his article:

Elohim with Plural Verbs: The first instance of *Elohim* with a plural verb is in Gen 20:13. In this passage Abraham explains to Abimelech how he plotted with Sarah to lie about her being his sister: “And it was when God caused me to wander (*hit’u oti Elohim...*) from the house of my father, that I said to her, this is the righteousness that you shall do with me, to every place which we come, say about me, he is my brother.”

The phrase “God caused me to wander” *hit’u oti Elohim...* has the plural verb *hit’u* ...meaning “they caused to wander” (*hif’il* past 3rd pl...). So contrary to the expected rule of *Elohim* getting a singular verb, here *Elohim* gets a plural verb. Because of this plural verb, we could literally translate this phrase “gods caused me to wander.”

However, in Gen 35:7 we find a second instance of this phenomenon. In this passage, we read about how Jacob built an altar at Bethel after his vision of the ladder: “And he built there an altar, and called the place, El Bet El, because there God revealed himself (pl) to him (*niglu elav ha’elohim...*) when he fled from his brother.”

The phrase “God revealed himself (pl) to him” (*niglu elav ha’elohim...*) has the plural verb *niglu*...meaning “they revealed themselves” or alternatively “they were revealed” (*nif’al* past 3rd pl...). We could literally translate this phrase as “the gods revealed themselves to him.” Again, we find *Elohim* accompanied by a plural verb contrary to the expected rule for a majestic plural. Here we can hardly say that someone is trying to

⁵⁸ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., “Elohim,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. ed., Grand Rapids, 1977, Vol. 1, pp. 267-84.

⁵⁹ Francis Brown, Edward Robinson, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993.

speak in the terms of an idolater since it is the narrator (Moses) himself who says these words. From these two verses in Genesis we might conclude that God is a plurality. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that in Genesis alone the word Elohim, referring to YHWH, gets singular verbs, adjectives, or pronouns some 157 times and only in these two instances does it receive plural verbs. At the same time, there is only one other instance in the entire Tanach of Elohim getting a plural verb.

The third instance of Elohim getting a plural verb appears in 2 Samuel 7:23 where David prays to YHWH: “And who is like Your (sg) people (*che’amcha...*) Israel, even one nation in the earth, whom Elohim (they) went (*halchu...*) to redeem for Himself (*lo...*) as a people.” In this verse David boasts that Israel is unique because God redeemed the Israelites for Himself, that is, he metaphorically paid their redemption price, thereby purchasing Israel as His own. The phrase “whom Elohim went to redeem” contains the plural verb *halchu...* meaning “they went,” that is “Elohim (they) went” rather than the expected singular verb *halach...* “Elohim (he) went.” Here again it appears that Elohim receives a plural verb contrary to the expected rule for majestic plural. However, in this passage we also find Elohim referred to as a numerical singular. David says *che’amcha...* “like Your people.”

Elohim with Plural Adjectives: Alongside the three examples where Elohim receives a plural verb, there are six examples where Elohim receives a plural adjective and these too must be understood as attraction. In five separate instances (Dt 5:26; 1 Sam 17:26; 1 Sam 17:36; Jer 10:10; Jer 23:36) we find the phrase *Elohim chayyim...* “living God” in which Elohim gets the masculine plural adjective *chayyim...* “living” (pl). As a majestic plural Elohim should have received the masculine singular adjective *chay...* “living” (sg). The expected phrase *Elohim chay...* actually appears in four other instances (2Ki 19:4, 16; Isaiah 37:4, 17). But in the five instances of *Elohim chayyim...* “living God” with the plural adjective we must determine whether the adjective has been made plural by attraction to Elohim’s plural suffix or whether it is a numerical plural with the meaning “living gods.” To answer this let us consider two instructive examples.

In Deuteronomy 5:26 we read, “For who among all flesh has heard the voice of the living (*chayyim...*) Elohim speaking (*medaber...*) from the midst of the fire like us and lived?” [Since no one has heard the voice of God the Father, whose voice was this?]

We see that the adjective “living” *chayyim...* is indeed plural, even though as a majestic plural Elohim should have received a singular adjective. However, we also see that the verb “speaking” *medaber...* is masculine singular. So while the adjective *chayyim...* is attracted to Elohim’s plural ending, Elohim does not lose its numerically singular meaning and as a result it still gets a singular verb.⁶⁰

In *The Multifform Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity*, Robert Kraft also shows clearly that there was no central Jewish thought that can be counted on in the period of the first century.

⁶⁰ Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 42, 1991, pp. 1-15.

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He shows that it is a mistake to read Talmudic writings backward as being representative of the Jewish belief and practices of the first century, just as it is wrong to read the “Christian” concepts of the fourth century backwards as being the representative thought of first-century Christianity. Here are quotes from his book:

The temptation to use such terms as “Judaism” and “Christianity” primarily in connection with what has survived in one’s own tradition as “Judaism” or “Christianity” is understandable. It is also extremely misleading. That which resulted when a certain type of Christianity achieved official status in the Roman Empire of the fourth century, and standardized for itself certain doctrinal and liturgical norms, should not be used to judge the earlier centuries, according to what I would like to believe is sound historical methodology. Similarly, the fact that after the Jewish revolts against Rome in 66-73 and again in 132-35, Judaism comes to mean primarily that torah (law)-oriented type of Rabbi-led Pharisaism which compiled and transmitted the Talmud and related Semitic literature (henceforth called ‘rabbinic’ Judaism), should not blind us to the complexities of the earlier situation. For Christianity, the reign of Constantine became a major turning-point; for Judaism, the catastrophes of 66-73 and 132-135 were equally pivotal. We must be careful in any attempt to move behind these major developments that we do not simply read later Christian and Jewish history back into the earlier periods.⁶¹

⁶¹ Robert A. Kraft, *The Multiform Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity*, University of Pennsylvania, revised version updated Sept. 21, 1992, (originally appeared in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, Jacob Neusner ed., Vol. 3, pp. 174-199).

Appendix D

The Issue of Plurality in Jewish Writings

In the book *Beyond the Cosmos, the Extra Dimensionality of God*, written by Hugh Ross, Ph.D., the author claims that there are over 500 scriptures in the Old and New Testaments that show plurality when referring to God. While this may be somewhat of a stretch, it is clear that the use of plural terms when discussing God is not an obscure practice among the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures. This is a quote from chapter 9 of the book:

More than five hundred Scripture verses, Old and New Testament refer to God as both singular and plural. Genesis opens with a reference to God the Creator... When the narrative zooms in on the creation of humans, the writer assigns both singular and plural pronouns for God: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” “So God created man in His own image.” Several other Bible verses refer to God with both singular and plural pronouns. One of God’s names in Scripture, Elohim, is the Hebrew plural form for El [Eloah], the word for God, or god, in the widest possible sense. Elohim used as a plural in Scripture can denote pagan images and the imaginary or demonic deities they represent (Deuteronomy 4:28 and 12:2). Yet in verses such as Genesis 1:1, the plural form denotes the singular supreme deity. The Bible declares emphatically there is only one Savior, one Creator, one Redeemer, and one Resurrectionist. The one name God assigns to Himself is the unpronounceable YHWH. In one paragraph of Scripture, both God the Father and God the Son lay claim to this name.”⁶²

Rabbi Tzvi Nassi, a lecturer in Hebrew at Oxford University in England in the 18th century quotes numerous sources from ancient Hebrew writings that confirm this idea of plurality outside the Bible. He is the author of a book entitled *The Great Mystery or How Can Three Be One?* He credits Maimonides with the emphasis on singularity as an answer to Christianity in the Middle Ages. Nassi was a Trinitarian and attempts to show that these plural references are proof of such a belief among the first-century Jews and Christians. In spite of his Trinitarian beliefs he does provide some interesting quotes from these ancient sources. Here is an abbreviated list of the sources he quotes:

- *The Zohar*, which is a book believed by Nassi to have been written by Rabbi Simon ben Jochai and his son Rabbi Eliezar in the years following the Roman destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. *Zohar* is the Hebrew term for “brilliance.” The book was a mystical commentary on the Torah. Late research has raised questions about the true author. But there are a number of references to a belief in plurality among the Jews. The book at least shows that not everyone could be considered in agreement with the idea of “strict monotheism” among the Jews of the first century.
- *The Propositions of the Zohar* is another book written by Rabbi Simeon that builds on the plural references found in ancient Jewish writings.

⁶² Hugh Ross, Ph.D., *Beyond the Cosmos, the Extra-Dimensionality of God*, NavPress Publishing Group, 1999.

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- Rabbi Eliezar Hakkalir in A.D. 70 taught God as a plural based on his understanding of Genesis 1:1. This is found in his book entitled *The Book of Creation*.
- Rabbi Bechai in his commentary on Genesis 1:1 explained that the Hebrew word for *elohim* is a compound of two words. He refers to the term as “These are God.”
- Jewish Targums. The term *Targum* refers to the Aramaic versions of the Old Testament along with commentary. (Targum was a term later used for translations of the Jewish Bible in other languages as well.) During the Babylonian captivity Aramaic replaced the Hebrew language. As a result, a paraphrase and commentary was written on the Torah so the people could be instructed. The two major Targums were the *Targum of Jonathan* and the *Targum of Onkelos*, both written by Jonathan ben Uziel. Genesis 19:24 in the Hebrew Scriptures reads, “Then YHWH rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from YHWH out of heaven.” The Targum describes YHWH in this passage as “the Word of the Lord.”
- *Jerusalem Targum*, also written by Jonathan ben Uziel before the time of Christ. In Exodus 3:14 the Hebrew Scriptures read, “And Elohim said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM;’ and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘Yehovah has sent me to you.’” The Targum on Exodus 3:14 uses the same title: “the Word of the Lord” to describe God. The verse reads as follows: “and the Word of the Lord said unto Moses: I am He who said unto the world, Be! and it was: and who in the future shall say to it, Be! and it shall be. And He said ‘Thus thou shalt say to the Children of Israel: ‘I Am hath sent me unto you.’”
- *The Works of Philo Judaeus*. Philo was from a wealthy Jewish family in Alexandria. He was a contemporary of Christ, Paul and Josephus. He is mentioned in the writings of Josephus as a “man of the highest honor” (Ant. XVIII, 259).

These are a few of the sources that Nassi quotes in support for plurality in the Godhead. Each one confirms the evidence of a plural concept of God among Jews and Christians during the first century. For the most part individuals simply accept that the Jews were strictly monotheistic during the time of the New Testament without any questions. This idea must be questioned in light of the evidence that is now available.

Adam Clarke in his comments on Revelation 19:13 and the use of the term “Word of God” refers to the Targums and makes a definitive statement that these references to the “Word” always mean a person. This may help explain John’s references to the “Word” in his Gospel (and in Revelation). Here is the quote from Clarke:

Written in the Targum, and in other Jewish writings, *meimera daiya*, “The word of Jehovah;” by which they always mean a *person*, and not a *word spoken*.⁶³

⁶³ Adam Clarke’s *Commentary* (abridged by Ralph Earle), World Bible Publishing Co., 1997.

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Certainly, the biblical record is more important than the references quoted by Nassi and other writers. While these are helpful in understanding the first-century world of Christianity, we must be sure we do our homework and look into the Scriptures as the primary source of our understanding about God. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that there is evidence from the first century that Jewish writers were discussing plurality in the Godhead.

Appendix E

Were the First-Century Jews Strict Monotheists?

One of the arguments against the deity of Christ is the argument from silence. This argument assumes that the Jews of Christ's day were strictly monotheistic and if Christ had professed to being God in the flesh this would have been a big issue at that time. But is it true that the Jews of the first century believed in "strict" monotheism?

There is no question but that the Jews were monotheistic, but how were they monotheistic? In the past 30 years much new information has come to light that sheds doubt on the traditional view of Jewish belief about the Godhead. More and more evidence shows that the Jews did struggle with the issue of plurality in the Godhead.

The Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament: Second Commonwealth Judaism in Recent Study by J. Julius Scott, Jr. of the Wheaton College Graduate School shows clearly that it is a mistake to believe that the Jews of the New Testament period were "strict monotheists" and they would never have accepted Jesus as God. Scott shows that the idea of "strict monotheism" did not develop until the Middle Ages and was an attempt to stop the encroachment by Christianity. Here are some quotes from Scott:

The immediate Jewish background of the New Testament was shaped by three cataclysmic events and their results as various groups of Jews reacted to them differently. First came the destruction of the Jewish state by the Babylonians in 587/6 BCE. The Hebrews lost their land, monarchy, holy city and temple and were scattered throughout the world. Consequently, they faced a theological crisis involving the nature, power, and goodness of God. They were also threatened culturally, racially, and ceremonially as they were thrown into proximity with other peoples and religious groups. In addition, the absence of recognized prophets left the Hebrews without divine guidance at a time when they felt most in need of support and direction.

Debate and disagreement continue about many facts and interpretations of the remains of Second Temple Judaism. Yet, something of a general agreement on a number of significant points has emerged. This includes new understandings, recognitions of previously obscure facts and emphases, and changed opinions. Some of the more important elements in this "new consensus" may be described as follows.

1. Intertestamental Judaism is a descendant of the Old Testament Hebrew faith and culture but is not identical with it... [Also we] must distinguish it from Rabbinic Judaism, which developed after the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the Jewish state. This distinction must be carefully noted in, among other things, attempting to use certain types of source materials, especially the Old Testament and Rabbinic writings, as witnesses to the faith and practices of this period.
2. Although Second Commonwealth Judaism had cardinal tenets, such as monotheism [which was not clearly defined], covenant, Torah, and the implications of these, it was

essentially a religion of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. Behavior and practice, not precise theological subscription, demonstrated faithfulness to the national or sectarian commitment.

3. The society, culture, faith and practice of Intertestamental Judaism were far from a monolithic whole. As we have already mentioned diversity was a major characteristic of the society and period; accordingly it is folly to seek a mainline or correct position or to assume that one particular group or trajectory can be identified as the “normative Judaism” of the period. The diverse elements which made up the fabric of Intertestamental Jewish society must be taken into account, both individually and together, in attempting to understand the period.
4. Our “new consensus” sees Second Temple Judaism, not as a “holding pattern” between the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, but as a dynamic civilization which faced and was given form by its response(s) to genuine tensions arising from political, cultural, sociological, existential, and religious situations and issues. This challenge took place within the context of commitment, on the one hand, to the abiding relevance of Jewish socio-nationalistic-religious heritage, as it was then understood, and, on the other hand, to the need to face realistically the changing circumstances of life in the world in which they lived.⁶⁴

Samson H. Levey, in *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation: The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum* published by Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1974, further confirms this diversity in Jewish thought in the time of the first century when it came to the Messiah. There is evidence that would include the Messiah being “divine” or God.

The diversity of this period is probably no where more evident than in eschatological expectations. Would the Consummation be simultaneous with or subsequent to the arrival of the Final Age? Would there be a divine agent (a Messiah), or would God personally intervene? If the former, would the Messiah be human, spiritual-angelic, or divine? Is the “Messiah” a personal, corporate, or idealized figure? Would there be a single Messianic figure or several? Would the role or task of the Messiah or Messiahs be primarily political, military, social, or religious? Would he be concerned solely for the affairs of the Hebrews or would he also benefit Gentiles and the natural order? What would be the status of Temple and Torah during the Final Age, of various Jewish groups, of the Gentiles? Although the majority of common people in The Land of Israel (the “Am Ha-Eretz” or “Average Jews”) seem to have held to some loosely defined hope of an essentially military-political-nationalistic Messiah(s) who would both deliver from enemies and enable God’s people to “serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness,” it is impossible to speak categorically about “*the single pre-Christian Jewish belief*” of almost anything [emphasis added].⁶⁵

⁶⁴ J. Julius Scott, Jr., *The Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament: Second Commonwealth Judaism in Recent Study*.

⁶⁵ Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation: The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1974.

Survey of the New Testament—Intertestamental Judaisms by Thomas L. Long has this to say about Judaism of the first century and just prior:

The period between the second century BCE and the second century CE is known to biblical historians as the “Intertestamental Period,” that is it marked the closure of the canon of the Hebrew scriptures and the formation of the canon of the Christian scriptures. This period is important to Jews because it includes the devastating Jewish revolt against the Roman empire, which resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple and the end of sacrificial worship, and it is important to Christians because it represents the matrix in which Jesus of Nazareth and his earliest disciples were formed. Because it was a period of tremendous theological diversity within Jewish practice, recent scholars of religion have tended to characterize it in the plural—Judaisms—rather than representing it as a single monolithic religious orthodoxy. What we know about this period comes from several sources: the Christian scriptures (not a particularly reliable historical document because they were often hostile to Jewish authorities), the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and the philosopher Philo of Alexandria, the Dead Sea Scrolls, archeological remains, and inscriptions.⁶⁶

In “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” Peter Hayman states:

In the academic world of twenty or thirty years ago it was conventional to hold that the story of Judaism was one of a gradual, but inexorable, evolution from a Canaanite/Israelite pagan and mythological environment into the pure light of an unsullied monotheism. It is hardly ever appropriate to use the term monotheism to describe the Jewish idea of God, that no progress beyond the simple formulas of the Book of Deuteronomy can be discerned in Judaism before the philosophers of the Middle Ages, and that Judaism never escapes from the legacy of the battles for supremacy between Yahweh, Ba'al and El from which it emerged.⁶⁷

It is also quite revealing to read the writings of the early writers as to how they viewed Christ. Ignatius (A.D. 110 to 117) wrote in his epistle to the Ephesians: “By the will of the Father and of Jesus Christ, our God... God Himself being manifested in human form.” In his epistle to the Trallians he writes: “Jesus our God.” In his epistle to the Romans: “Jesus Christ our God.” In Magnesians 6, Ignatius writes: “Jesus was with the Father before the beginning of time...”

Polycarp was another early writer. In his epistle to the Philippians he wrote about Jesus Christ as “God and our Lord.” This is further proof that the Jews and the Christians of the first century did have a grasp of the concept of plurality in the Godhead. While they were monotheistic, one needs to explain exactly what is meant by the term. There was clearly room in their theology for Christ to be God.

⁶⁶ Thomas L. Long, *Survey of the New Testament—Intertestamental Judaisms*.

⁶⁷ Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 42, 1991.

Appendix F

Explicit Scriptures?

The argument is made by unitarians that the Scriptures are *explicit* in statements made about the absolute unity of God. But is that true? How does one answer the scriptures that make the claim that there is only “one” God? First of all, it should be noted that there is no scripture that uses the term “one God being.” Of course there are statements such as “one Lord” and “none beside Me.” Do these scriptures establish the case for only one member in the Godhead? It is a fair question to ask and certainly deserves an answer. This appendix examines the scriptures that are most commonly used by unitarians to proclaim the “oneness” of God and deny the divinity of Jesus Christ.

There are many reasons for believing that Jesus Christ is divine and that He preexisted His human birth. The weight of biblical evidence is clear that Jesus Christ is God (John 1:1-3). Christ is eternal and He existed before the creation. So how should the scriptures be addressed that seem to exclude Him from being God?

Exodus 3:14: “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

The question is asked why there isn’t a plural reference to God in this passage. It should be noted that there are many singular references to God in the Old Testament. When God introduces Himself to Moses it is in the singular. This passage isn’t defining the Godhead nor counting the number of members. In John 1:18 Jesus states that “no one has seen God at any time” and in John 5:37, when referring to the Father, He states, “You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.” Whose voice did Moses hear? When other scriptures are considered, it is clear that it isn’t the voice of God the Father that is being heard, but someone else’s voice who is identified as “I AM.” Rather than proving singularity, we see a clear statement of plurality—one member speaking on behalf of another, yet the statement is in the first person.

Deuteronomy 4:35: “To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.”

This section of Deuteronomy is condemning idolatry. Israel departed from Egypt and left behind the multitude of gods that were worshipped in that pagan society. In this context God tells Israel that they should worship no other God. They are to worship the true God. We know from other scriptures that the Father and Son are one (John 10:30) and that if you have seen the Son you have seen the Father (John 14:9).

Deuteronomy 32:39: “Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.”

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This verse is also addressing idolatry. Notice the following verses of this chapter that provide a better understanding of the context:

Verse 12: “So the LORD alone led him, and there was **no foreign god** with him.”

Verse 16: “They provoked Him to jealousy **with foreign gods**; with abominations they provoked Him to anger.”

Verse 17: “They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to **gods they did not know**, to new gods, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear.”

Verse 21: “They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; they have moved Me to anger by **their foolish idols**. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation.”

Verse 37: “He will say: ‘**Where are their gods**, the rock in which they sought refuge?’”

2 Kings 19:15: “Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: ‘O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.’”

In this prayer, Hezekiah prays to God in the singular. Even in the New Testament Christ instructs us to pray to the Father, in the name of the Son. This verse doesn’t prove that there is only one member in the Godhead, but only shows a prayer to *YHWH* God (*Elohim*, which can also denote plurality).

Isaiah 43:10: “‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, ‘and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.’”

This is also written in the context of idolatry. God is saying that all the foreign gods were formed or created, but not God. This verse is not defining the Godhead but simply contrasting the Godhead with the idols built by the nations. Other verses in this chapter are quite revealing. If this verse were taken to mean that only the Father is God, it would deny the divinity of Christ who is also God.

Verse 11 continues: “I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior.” Yet in the New Testament we find that Jesus Christ is the “only” savior. Notice the following verses which illustrate that Christ is our Savior: John 4:42; Acts 5:31; Acts 13:23; 2 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 1:11. But we know Christ is not the only Savior as the verses below show. In the ultimate sense God the Father is our Savior as well.

1 Timothy 1:1: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope...”

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1 Timothy 2:3: “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.”

Titus 1:3: “...but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior.”

Titus 2:10: “...not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

Titus 3:4: “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared...”

Jude 25: “To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”

Isaiah 43:11 must be understood in terms of the total plan of salvation. God is the ultimate Savior, but no one can come to the Father except through Christ—so both play a necessary part in the plan of salvation.

Isaiah 44:8: “Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.”

Two verses prior to this verse, we read the following: “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God’” (Isaiah 44:6). Jesus Christ is identified as the King of Israel, the Redeemer of Israel, and the First and the Last as clearly stated in John 1:49, Isaiah 59:20 and Revelation 22:13. Jesus Christ is called the “Rock” in 1 Corinthians 10:4. So again we see that the intent of these verses is to counter idolatry and not to establish the number of beings in the one Godhead. There are many other scriptures that speak of Christ in the same language as those found in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 45:5-6, 21: “I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other... Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me.”

The theme is the same as the previous verses. This is a consistent theme throughout the prophets—rejection of idolatry. Notice verse 16: “They shall be ashamed and also disgraced, all of them; they shall go in confusion together, who are makers of idols.” And verse 20: “Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you who have escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god that cannot save.”

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In the New Testament Jesus Christ is freely worshipped. He is God in the flesh and He is called “my God” by Thomas. If Jesus is not a member of the one true Godhead, then idolatry is present among the people of God in the New Testament. But this isn’t the case. The requirement that God is alone is in comparison to the pagan gods that existed in that day. Only God can be trusted. Our faith must be in God and Christ. There are currently two beings in the one Godhead. If you have seen the Son, you have seen the Father. They are One in Spirit (John 10:30; 17:22).

1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

Does this verse prove that the Father is God and Jesus is only a man? Jesus Christ is a member of the Godhead and has been for all eternity (John 1:1). He is also our Savior and the mighty God (Isaiah 9:6). But He also lived in the flesh as a human being. The Father never “became flesh.” In this verse Paul makes a point about the humanity of Jesus Christ. Through His death and subsequent resurrection, He is the Mediator between the Father and humanity. He was “one of us” when He walked this earth in human form.

James 2:19: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”

The Bible teaches the “oneness” of God as defined by Jesus Christ in John 10:30: “I and My Father are One.” The demons also believe. There is no denial of the one Godhead. The New Testament clearly describes both the Father and the Son as God.

1 Timothy 6:13-16: “I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”

When the statement is made “He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality,” is it speaking of the Father or is it speaking of Jesus Christ? There is some confusion in the wording here, but most accept the fact that this applies to God the Father (“whom no man has seen or can see”). But these verses do not deny that these references are also made of Jesus Christ. He is called “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” in Revelation 19:16. Does this mean that Christ isn’t immortal? We know from other scriptures that He does have eternal life. What is the difference?

God the Father “alone has immortality.” This word (immortality) is defined as “perpetual life.”⁶⁸ Jesus Christ gave up His position in the Godhead to become human and die for the sins of mankind. The Father has never relinquished His immortality. He alone possesses “perpetual life.” Nothing in these verses denies the nature of Christ as being the same as the Father.

⁶⁸ Worldnet Dictionary, <http://www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/immortality>.

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These are some of the scriptures most often used to deny the preexistence and divinity of Jesus Christ. Unitarians place themselves in a logical contradiction, on the one hand they deny the preexistence of Christ in eternity, but on the other hand they try to make Jesus into God after His human conception and birth. Thus they try to have it both ways. If the resurrected Jesus Christ exists on the God plane, then there are two beings in the Godhead. Jesus states that He exists as the I AM and that He is seated at the right hand of God: “Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14:62). “Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69). “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

To properly divide the word of truth and understand the Scriptures, we must weigh all the evidence—line upon line and precept upon precept. And when this is done, we reach the irrefutable conclusion that Jesus is God and a member of the Godhead. He preexisted His human birth with the glory He shared with the Father before the world began, which was restored after His resurrection. He is our Savior and soon coming King. We were purchased with His blood, the blood of the Messiah—God in the flesh!

Appendix G

Genesis 19:24 and Plurality

In Genesis 19:24 *YHWH number one* rained brimstone and fire from a *second YHWH out of heaven*. The first *YHWH* is on earth; He is the one who had been speaking previously to Abraham. *YHWH* had appeared to him at the oaks of Mamre and had warned him about the coming destruction of Sodom. That *YHWH* who was on earth, *YHWH number one*, was now raining fire and brimstone from another *YHWH* who is in heaven. Thus the term *YHWH* is used here of two different beings.

Although some scholars see this as a simple effort to show emphasis—repeating *YHWH* to emphasize that this is judgment from God—not all commentators see it this way. Adam Clarke states:

The Lord rained brimstone and fire from the Lord. As all judgment is committed to the Son of God, many of the primitive fathers and several modern divines have supposed that the words ... (*vaihovah*) and ... (*meeth Yehovah*) imply, Jehovah the Son raining brimstone and fire from Jehovah the Father; and that this place affords no mean proof of the proper Divinity of our blessed Redeemer.⁶⁹

Adam Clarke goes on to state that he doesn't consider this as definitive proof of the divinity and preexistence of Christ, but he states it as a curiosity that such a reference would appear in the context of a discussion between Abraham and *YHWH*.

It may be so; but though the point is sufficiently established elsewhere, it does not appear to me to be *plainly* indicated here. And it is always better on a subject of this kind not to have recourse to *proofs*, which require *proofs* to confirm them. It must however be granted that *two* persons mentioned as Jehovah in one verse, is both a strange and curious circumstance; and it will appear more remarkable when we consider that the person called Jehovah, who conversed with Abraham, (see chap. xviii.,) and sent those two angels to bring Lot and his family out of this devoted place, and seems himself after he left off talking with Abraham to have ascended to heaven, Genesis 19:33, does not any more appear on this occasion till we hear that *JEHOVAH rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from JEHOVAH out of heaven*. This certainly gives much countenance to the opinion referred to above, though still it may fall short of positive proof.⁷⁰

Matthew Henry adds a similar statement about this incident:

Concerning this destruction observe, 1. God was the immediate author of it. It was destruction from the Almighty: *The Lord rained—from the Lord* (v. 24), that is, God from himself, by his own immediate power, and not in the common course of nature. Or, God

⁶⁹Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, Crosswalk.com, 1995-2004.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

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the Son from God the Father; for the Father has committed all judgment to the Son. Note, He that is the Savior will be the destroyer of those that reject the salvation.⁷¹

Genesis 19:24 must also be viewed in the context of Christ's statement in John 1:18, "No one has seen God at any time." This is repeated by John 5:37. If John could state in the first century that no one had seen God at any time, then with whom was Abraham speaking, walking and eating in Genesis 18? The Scriptures clearly state that Abraham was doing all these things with *YHWH*. If there is but one being identified as God and no one has seen Him at any time, there is a dilemma. The dilemma is cleared up when one comes to understand that the *YHWH* who appeared to Abraham was the one who became Jesus Christ and He came to reveal the Father.

⁷¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Crosswalk.com, 1995-2004.