

Trinity in the Old Testament

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History has many examples of persons distinguishing between the God of the OT and NT and questioning the Trinity in the OT. The following are a few examples. In his *Antithesis*, the Gnostic Marcion (d. ca. 160), the “most formidable heretic” to oppose the revealed truth of Scripture since the writing of the NT,¹ claimed that “the finite, imperfect, angry Jehovah of the Jews” and the “good or gracious God” revealed by Christ were two different Gods.² In fact, according to Marcion, the OT God is evil (or at least the author of evil), while the NT God is good.³ Tertullian (ca. 155–220) wrote five books against Marcion’s heretical ideas⁴ and is the most important early thinker to demonstrate the importance of rejecting any dualism in the Trinity.

During the whole 3rd century A.D., Modalistic Monarchianism (or Sabellianism, or Patripassianism) stated that one God took on different modes. He was the Father in the OT, the Son in the Gospels, and the Spirit since Pentecost—the same God appearing in three different modes of revelation.⁵ The stress here was on the oneness of God against pagan

¹ Philip Schaff, Introduction, *ANF* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:7.

² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 2:482–487.

³ Bradley Nassif, “Marcion (d. c. 154)” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 350–352.

⁴ Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, in *ANF*, 3:270–474.

⁵ Schaff, *History*, 2:572; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500* (Peabody: Prince, 1997), 1:143–145. As William Shedd put it, “The Sabellian Trinity is economic, that is, one of offices, as one and the same human person may be a citizen, a magistrate, and a parent. It is not an intrinsic and immanent Trinity, but

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polytheism,⁶ which denied a Trinity in either the OT or the NT. Much later, Michael Servetus (1511–1553) believed the Trinity had little biblical support, and if theology could rid itself of the Trinitarian idea, this would contribute to the conversion of Jews and Muslims.⁷ Socinians (16th–19th century) emphatically denied the divinity of Christ, and so rejected the Trinity.⁸ Their Racovian Catechism (1605) was one of the earliest antitrinitarian statements since Arianism (4th century) and became the forerunner of Deism and Unitarianism (both promoting God as one).⁹ The 17th century witnessed a vigorous defense of the Trinity against Socinian and Arminian views and modern forms of Sabellianism and Arianism.¹⁰

It is well known that many biblical scholars, past and present, reject a continuity between law and grace and hence distinguish the God of law (OT) from the God of grace (NT). Even more radical, the Dispensationalists assume that God deals differently with those living in one historical period than with others living in another historical period. For example, Lewis Chafer claims that these different dispensations are “the very foundation of a science such as Systematic Theology.” He then continues:

Though too often confused, the divine government is different in each of these ages, being adapted perfectly to the relation which the people in their respective dispensations sustain to God. Each of these systems of human government is wholly

one of manifestation only” *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed., 1888–1894, ed. Alan W. Gomes (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2003), 239.

⁶ “Monarchianism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 440, 441.

⁷ “Unitarianism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 700.

⁸ This influential movement was headed by two Italian lay theologians: Sozzini (or Sozzini) was their surname; They were Lelio (1525–1562) and his nephew Faustus (1539–1604). See John Marshall, “Socinianism,” in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 845. They taught that Christ didn’t become God until after His resurrection; see P. Kubricht, “Socinus, Faustus (1539–1604),” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1122. Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, 1902, 21st ed. (Chicago: American Baptist, 1948), 2:329.

⁹ P. Kubricht, “Racovian Catechism (1605),” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 979.

¹⁰ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520–1725: The Trinity of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 4:147.

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complete in itself. The Mosaic law contained the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances, and was an expression of God's will to Israel to whom alone it was addressed. In the teaching of grace addressed only to the Church, God has disclosed in full the manner of life which becomes those who are already perfected in Christ.¹¹

Dispensationalists distinguish between Israel and the church, designating the old covenant as law and the new covenant as grace. Charles Hodge believed Scripture contrasts the old and the new covenants in several ways. One way is that the new reveals the same covenant, but "it is spoken of as a state of tutelage and bondage, far different from the freedom and filial spirit of the dispensation under which we now live . . . in the New Testament the gospel greatly predominates over the law. Whereas, under the Old Testament, the law predominated over the gospel."¹² Predestinarians promote a difference in humans due to sovereign rather than human choice.¹³ What these human ideas have in common is questioning the God of Scripture.

However, there is a problem. If God is a solitary Person in the OT ("Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, is one," Deut 6:4),¹⁴ and a Trinity in the NT (at Christ's baptism, Matt 3:16, 17; and in Christ's great commission, Matt 28:19), how can He be a God of love (1 John 4:8b) throughout human history? In other words, how can a solitary God (OT) love as the Trinity does (NT)? Such assumed differences are not merely between law and grace, bondage and freedom, sovereign and free choice, but have to do with God Himself. If God relates to humans differently at any time and in any way, what does this do to His words "I the Lord do not change" (Mal 3:6)? Our presentation is confined to whether God is only solitary in the OT, compared to a Trinity in the NT.

¹¹ Lewis Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, xi, and xxi. The entire preface gives insight into the uniqueness of Dispensational theology, v-xxxviii.

¹² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.p., n.d.), 2:376.

¹³ Predestinarians distinguish between the elect, whom God chooses in eternity, and the reprobate, whom God rejects in eternity, disallowing the possibility that free human choice in history in either the OT or the NT might have anything to do with human destiny. This calls into question the statements that God doesn't show partiality (2 Chron 19:7; Job 34:19).

¹⁴ The *Shema* is found in three passages (Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41); Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27-16:20*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 34b:263.

Old Testament Shema

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4, NIV, NASB, NKJV), or “one Lord” (NEB, KJV, RSV), or “The Lord alone” (Goodspeed), or “the Lord our God is one Lord, the only Lord” (Amplified). Commentators recognize that the Hebrew can be translated in different ways.¹⁵ The next chapter in Deuteronomy, about the Decalogue, begins the same way: “Hear, O Israel . . . the Lord our God” (Deut 5:1, 2a), and the word “one” can be considered as a title or name for God.¹⁶ Two chapters before the *Shema*, the Red Sea miracle (exodus redemption) calls forth the exclamation, “the Lord is God . . . there is no other” (Deut 4:39), which echoes “who among the gods is like you, O Lord” (Exod 15:11a), which anticipates the first commandment and its prologue “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, You shall have no other gods before me.” These texts focus on the uniqueness of God.

The *Shema*

expresses not only the *uniqueness* but also the *unity* of God. As one God (or the “Unique”), when he spoke there was no other to contradict; when he promised, there was no other to revoke that promise; when he warned, there was no other to provide refuge from the warning. He was not merely first among the gods, as Baal in the Canaanite pantheon, Amon-Re in Egypt, or Marduk in Babylon, he was the one and only God.¹⁷

What is this oneness that is attributed to God? Is it more than a *name*, *uniqueness*, and the *one and only*? There are two words for “one” in Hebrew (1) *yāhîd* means unique, such as an only son (Gen 22:2) and an only child (Prov 4:3; Zech 12:10), whereas (2) *’ehād* means united, such as “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). The word *’ehād* (united) is used in the *Shema*. Millard Erickson observes that the unity of husband and

¹⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 168. Duane L. Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 6A, 142, notes the following: C. H. Gordon suggests “Yahweh is our God, is ‘One’” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970) 198; and S. D. Mc Bride translates it as “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone” *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 274.

¹⁶ Craigie, 168.

¹⁷ Craigie, 169.

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wife is “not uniqueness, but the unity of diversity. It speaks of union, rather than aloneness”¹⁸ That’s why Duane L. Christensen says, “The word אֱלֹהִים in the text of the *Shema*^c speaks not only of the *uniqueness*, but also of the *unity* of God. The doctrine of monotheism is implicit in this brief creedal statement.”¹⁹ The Hebrew word for “one” (*yāhîd*), meaning solitary, or without others, is not used in the *Shema*. So it seems that the *Shema* not only speaks of the uniqueness of God as the only God, but “refers to the oneness that results from a unity of numerous persons.”²⁰

Elohim is a plural term for God (for *El* is God, and most names for God add to the word *El*). This didn’t bother monotheists, which indicates that the plurality of the name wasn’t confused with polytheism. Rather, as Herman Bavinck concludes, the plural form of this name for God “refers to the deity in the fullness and richness of its life. The God of revelation is not an abstract ‘monad’ but the true and living God, who in the infinite fullness of his life contains the highest diversity.”²¹

*Further Old Testament Evidence for Plurality.*²² The plurality of God is also present in the following: (1) After sin entered the world “the Lord said [singular], ‘The man has now become like one of us [plural], knowing good and evil’” (Gen 3:22a); (2) “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying [singular], ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us [plural]?’” (Isa 6:8).

In Hebrew, more than one Person in the one God is conveyed by God’s use of the plural cohortative “let us”: (1) “Then God said [singular], ‘Let us [plural] make man in our image’” (Gen 1:26a); (2) in response to the Babel tower builders God said [singular], “Come, let us [plural] go down and confuse their language so they will not be able to understand each other” (Gen 11:7). When God said “let us,” “one of us,” or “for us,” He indicated that more than one Person is in the Godhead, even though He told Israel that their God was one. *While focusing on one God to keep them from many gods, He allowed them to glimpse that one God as more than one Person.*

¹⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 174.

¹⁹ Christensen, 145.

²⁰ Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 33, 34

²¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:261.

²² In this segment the singular and plural are pointed out in supplied brackets.

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It should be kept in mind that the above plurals are not plurals of majesty, when a royal person (singular) says “we grant you this privilege,” for there are no other royal persons in Scripture who speak in this way.²³ We must not read into Scripture ideas understood in our culture. George A. F. Knight is right to say that believing that Scripture contains plurals of majesty “is to read into Hebrew speech a modern way of thinking. The kings of Israel and Judah are all addressed in the singular in our biblical records.”²⁴

Here are other examples of plurality in God: (1) “Now the Sovereign Lord has sent me with his Spirit” (Isa 48:16b); (2) “I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the Lord their God” (Hos 1:7); and (3) “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty” (Mal 3:1).

Angel of the Lord²⁵

An internal indicator for plurality in God is the phrase “the angel of the Lord.” The following examples document that the “angel of the Lord” is sometimes God, for the “angel of the Lord” (*Yahweh*) in the OT is the pre-incarnate Christ. This angel’s relationship with persons in the OT compares well with the Christ we know in the NT, thus showing the

²³ Wayne Grudem: *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity and Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 227.

²⁴ G. A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Edinburgh: Oliver & James, 1953), 20.

²⁵ In commenting on 2 Cor 5:15, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,” Ellen White says, “Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man. The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the holiness of the law of God. All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ. It was the Son of God that gave to our first parents the promise of redemption. It was He who revealed Himself to the patriarchs Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses understood the gospel. They looked for salvation through man’s Substitute and Surety. These holy men of old held communion with the Saviour who was to come to our world in human flesh; and some of them talked with Christ and heavenly angels face to face. Christ was not only the leader of the Hebrews in the wilderness—the Angel in whom was the name of Jehovah, and who, veiled in the cloudy pillar went before the host—but it was He who gave the law to Israel.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 366.

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Christ of the OT is the same as the Christ of the NT, and the distinction placed between the OT God and the NT God is not warranted.

(1) When Hagar fled from Sarah, “The angel of the Lord” found her near a spring in the desert. The angel of the Lord named her baby and told Hagar to return to Sarah and submit to her. “The angel added, ‘I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count . . . for the Lord heard your misery.’” Only God can do that, so Hagar said, “You are the God who sees me.” This God said the Lord had heard of her misery, so God referred to the Lord, and in so doing gave insight into there being more than one Person in the Godhead (Gen 16:7–13).

(2) When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, “The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand of the seashore’” (Gen 22:11–17). The angel of the Lord is called the Lord (Heb. *Yahweh*), and He speaks twice in the passage (vs. 11, 12; 15–18), and God (Heb. *’Elōhîm*) is mentioned four times (vs. 1, 3, 8, 9). It is *Yahweh* who saves Abraham from sacrificing His son, blesses Him, and Abraham calls the place “*Yahweh* will provide” (v. 14), an insight into the future day when on the same mount, Christ would provide the sacrifice for all humans.

(3) When Israel blessed Joseph he said, “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who had delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys” (Gen 48:15, 16a; cf. Gen 24:7, 40; Exod 32:34).

(4) Once “the angel of the Lord” spoke to Jacob in a dream explaining how to increase his flocks, out of pity for what his father-in-law Laban was doing to him. He said to Jacob, “I am the God of Bethel” (Gen 31:10–13). At Bethel the pre-incarnate Christ gave Jacob a dream of a ladder between earth and heaven, with angels ascending and descending, to let him know he was not alone. He promised, “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen 28:12b–15). He told Jacob to leave the land, and thus to leave Laban, and return home (Gen 31:13b). Laban pursued Jacob, but the pre-incarnate Christ appeared to Laban in a dream at night, saying “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad” (Gen 31:24).

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The report that Esau, with four hundred men, was coming to meet him caused Jacob “great fear and distress” (Gen 32:7a). He prayed to God to save him, claiming the covenant promises given to him. Then came the night of wrestling. With whom did Jacob wrestle? Genesis says it was with a man (Gen 32:22–30), but Hosea is more specific: Jacob wrestled “with the angel” who was “God” (Hos 12:3, 4).²⁶ The pre-incarnate God stayed with Jacob that night and blessed Him, changing His name to Israel before departing (Gen 32:26–29). In Hebrew culture names stood for character. The name “Jacob” means deceiver, and the name “Israel” means “you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome” (v. 28b). His “new name is a guarantee of a successful meeting with his brother Esau.” The name “Esau” reminded him of deceiving Esau in the past, whereas the name “Israel” would remind him of victory over Esau in the future. This was an encouragement to him. And Israel became the name of God’s chosen people, and so to be named the same was an honor. That night the pre-incarnate Christ gave him forgiveness for the past and a promise for the future.²⁷ No wonder Israel exclaimed, “I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (v. 30).

(5) When Moses stood before the burning bush, “the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush . . . When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses, Moses! . . . Then he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (Exod 3:2–6). But the pre-incarnate Christ promised to give Moses success in his mission in leading God’s people (Exod 3:16–4:17).

(6) Israel was terrified as the army of Pharaoh closed in behind them as they faced the Red Sea. Then “the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them,” and during the Red Sea crossing, “the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and

²⁶ Compare Joshua, who was confronted by a man near Jericho who said He was “commander of the army of the Lord” and asked Joshua to take off his shoes because it was holy ground, just as God asked Moses at the burning bush. Here is the pre-incarnate Christ as the commander of God’s army, as He had been at the Exodus, and He appeared as a man to Joshua (Joshua 5:13–15). However, in Joshua 12:8 “the Angel of the Lord” leads His people into battle to destroy all nations that attack Jerusalem. So the man and “the Angel of the Lord” are the same pre-incarnate Christ.

²⁷ See Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1994), 2:296, 297.

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cloud at the Egyptians and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving” (Exod 14:1–25a). In praising the angel of the Lord (Exod 14:19), Israel sang the song of Moses after the Red Sea deliverance: “Who is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (Exod 15:11). New Testament corroboration says the angel of the Lord through Moses “led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert” (Acts 7:35, 36), For forty years in the desert they were fed by manna (Exod 16:15, 31, 33; Psa 78:24), drank water (Neh 9:20), and their clothes didn’t wear out (Deut 8:4).

(7) Later, during the time of the Judges, “The angel of the Lord” said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you . . . Yet you have disobeyed me” (Judg 2:1, 2). When the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon, he addressed Him as “Lord,” and to Gideon’s concerns Scripture says, “The Lord answered” (Judges 6:12–16). The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah’s wife (Sampson’s mother), promising she would give birth to a son who would deliver Israel from the Philistines (Judg 13:27). Manoah prayed to God that the angel of the Lord would come back, and He did and talked to Manoah, after which the angel ascended in the flames from the alter of burnt offering, and Manoah exclaimed, “We have seen God!” (Judg 13:19–22).

(8) Clearly the angel of the Lord is the covenant-making God, the same God who spoke to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3). This is the Lord who gave the Ten Commandments to His people (Exod 20; Acts 7:38), the law identified with the covenant (Deut 4:13). This is why Christ said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (John 5:46). God said, to Israel, “I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him” (Exod 23:20, 21). Here God spoke about the pre-incarnate Christ and said He had His name. That is to say, He also is called God. Here is a clear statement that there is more than one Person in the Godhead, and a clear statement that they share the same name “God,” and in this respect there is only one God, the God who is represented by these two in the passage.

(9) Paul identifies the angel of the Lord. “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized

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into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:1–4).

The OT God is unique compared to idols: He is Creator of everything, foretells the future, acts as none other can, and is the Savior of the world.²⁸ The texts on the “angel of the Lord” indicate that this unique God is a relational God. He is the same God we know from the NT. For the OT says, “I the Lord do not change” (Mal 3:6), and the NT says “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

Sola Scriptura Evidence for an Old Testament Trinity

The *sola scriptura* hermeneutic is Scripture interpreting Scripture, and in our case, allowing the NT to interpret the OT texts on God. This hermeneutic is vital to biblical understanding and is crucial in evaluating Dispensational claims regarding the continuing relevance of OT prophecies for contemporary Israel.²⁹

Creation. In the creation of male and female in the image of God (Gen 1:26, 27), the Persons of the Godhead are imaged in the oneness of man and woman in marriage. The *sola scriptura* hermeneutic specifies the reality of that image as the Spirit (Gen 1:2; Psa 104:30; cf. Job 33:4; 26:13) and the Father creating everything through the Son (Col 1:15, 16; Heb 1:2b), and hence the reality of the image is a oneness in three, or the Trinity.

²⁸ The OT is unequivocal that there is only one God: “the Lord is God; besides him there is no other . . . the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other” (Deut 4:35b, 39b). This theme is repeated in a number of texts (e.g., Deut 32:39; 1 Kings 8:60). Often God is mentioned as Creator compared to the gods who were creations (e.g., Isa 44:6–24; 45:5–18; 46:1–4). “It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts” (Isa 45:12). God foretells the future (Isa 48:14). God says He will raise up Cyrus to free His people from Babylonian captivity, and the vanquished “will bow down before you and plead with you, saying ‘Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god.’ Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel!” (Isa 45:14b, 15). He is the God of universal salvation: “Turn to me and be saved all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isa 45:22). He is the God who will be victor over the cosmic controversy in the final judgment: “Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength. All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame’” (Isa 45:23b, 24).

²⁹ For evidence of this, see Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003), 1:717–749.

Christ's Mission and Inauguration. In Luke 4:18, 19, Christ read from Isaiah 61:1, 2, recognizing the verses as a statement of His mission, and in so doing indicated that Isa 61:1, 2 speaks of the Trinity as follows: "The Spirit [Holy Spirit] of the Sovereign Lord [the Father] is on me [Christ]" (Isa 61:1a). This is Christ's commentary on this OT passage. The inauguration of Christ in heaven is another example of more than one Person in the one God. "Your throne, O God [Heb. *ʾElōhîm*], will last for ever and ever . . . You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God [literally "God, God of you"] has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy" (Psa 45:6, 7). Here God is addressing God; two Persons share the name of God (Heb. *ʾElōhîm*). Who are they? This passage is quoted in Hebrews 1:8, 9. "But about the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever . . . You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions.'" Here God speaks to Christ after His victorious life on earth when He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 1:3b).

Compare Psalm 110:1: "The Lord [Heb. *Yahweh*] says to my Lord [Heb. *ʾadōnî*]: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" That future must have encouraged Christ. In fact, on one occasion Christ asked the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They replied, "the son of David," to which Jesus responded. "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" (Matt 22:41–45).

The Trinity in Isaiah

It is well known that the Trinity is explicit in the NT and only implicit in the OT. However, internal evidence provided below indicates that the Trinity can rise to the level of being explicit in the OT. There are several examples in the Book of Isaiah.

(1) The Trinity is explicit in Isa 42:1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations." God the Father is speaking about His Son, to whom He will give the Holy Spirit. The NT comments that this passage from Isaiah was fulfilled in the healing ministry of Jesus (Matt 12:15–21), who was sent by the Father (John 3:16, 17) and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:16, 17; Luke 4:18). The heart relationship of the Father for the Son is seen in this passage, for the Father

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says Christ is “the one I love, in whom I delight” (Matt 12:18a). Here is specific insight into the loving relationship among the three in the Godhead. They love each other, and as such are by nature “love” (1 John 4:8). Here is a glimpse into the relational Trinity.

(2) The Trinity is explicit in Isa 48:16: “Come near me and listen to this [cf. “Listen to me, O Jacob . . . I am the first and the last” v. 12] . . . And now the Sovereign Lord [Father] has sent me [Christ], with his Spirit” [Holy Spirit].

(3) The Trinity is explicit in Isa 63:7–14. We will focus on verses 7–10a:

I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, “Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me”; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.

(1) **Kindnesses** of the Lord, v. 7: The verse begins and ends with the word “kindnesses,” which is the Hebrew word *hesed*, meaning covenant love, faithful love, undeserved love. This is in utter contrast to Israel, the covenant partners, who rebelled (Heb. *mārâh*) and grieved (Heb. *âtsab*) the Spirit of God (v. 10a). The contrast is between the Father (and the Trinity) as faithful in love to Israel who are unfaithful as rebels to God. Gomer, the prostitute wife of Hosea (older contemporary of Isaiah), typifies this unfaithful relationship (Hos 1:2). Isaiah said, “They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him” (Isa 1:4b).³⁰

³⁰ Most in Israel rebelled and caused God to be angry. They never entered into His rest (Heb 3:7–11; cf. Psalms 95: 7–11). For “those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in because of their disobedience” (Heb 4:6; cf. 2, 3). For those who heard the gospel failed to understand its value, because they “did not combine it with faith” (Heb 4:2). In the NT Christ, moved with sorrow, exclaimed, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt 23:37–39).

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(2) *Kindnesses of the Lord*, v. 7: The word “Lord” (Heb. *Yahweh*, mentioned three times in the verse) is a distinct being from “the angel of the Lord” (Heb. *Yahweh* in verse 9), and both are distinct from the Holy Spirit (vs. 10a, 11b), who is said to be the “Spirit of the Lord” (Heb. *Yahweh* in verse 14a). Here we have: (1) *Yahweh*, (2) angel of *Yahweh*, and (3) Spirit of *Yahweh*, an explicit reference to the Trinity, and a specified relationship between them: the Son and Spirit are related to the Father, for they both share the name *Yahweh* with the Father. The Trinity is *hesed* love (cf. “God is love,” Gr. *agapē*, 1 John 4:8b, 16).

(3) *He too was distressed*, v. 9: God was not aloof, impassible or unmoved by human suffering (as in Platonism and in the classical theism of Christian Theology). He suffered with His people. “God’s saviorhood involves much more than merely delivering people from their afflictions; it involves participation in the afflictions with the afflicted”³¹ (cf. Heb 4:16, 17). He also suffers in place of His people, as seen in the suffering Servant (Isa 52:13–53:12), which is the most profound OT revelation of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The text continues with the Father and Son redeeming these rebels, lifting them up, and carrying them, reminiscent of a lost lamb being carried on the shoulders of the Shepherd Christ (Luke 15:5). I agree with Geoffrey Grogan that “Verse 9 is one of the most moving expressions of the compassionate love of God in the OT, reminding the reader of some of the great passages in Hosea, Isaiah’s older contemporary.”³²

(4) *The angel of His face*, v. 9: God the Father (name given to Him in v. 16) calls Himself the Savior of Israel (at the Red Sea, vs. 11–14), and “in all their distress he too was distressed” (vs. 8b, 9a). Then His angel is introduced as the “angel of his face” (Heb. *pāneh* = face or presence). This is the only time this expression appears in the OT.³³ What does “face” imply? “The genitive פָּנֵי . . . is not to be taken objectively in the sense of ‘the angel who sees His face,’ but as explanatory, ‘the angel who is His face, or in whom His face is manifested.’”³⁴ “the face of

³¹ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: The New International Commentary on the OT: Isaiah 40–66*, ed. R. K. Harrison, Robert L. Hubbard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 606.

³² Geoffrey W. Grogan, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:342.

³³ John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34–66*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Waco: Word, 1987), 332. The expression does occur in rabbinic writings; cf. Oswalt, 607.

³⁴ F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT in Ten Volumes*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 7/2, 455.

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God' is His self-revealing presence."³⁵ Here Christ, to some degree, is in the same role of manifesting the Father as later in the NT He said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9b). The angel of the Lord "speaks as the Lord and is yet distinct from him, in whom the holy God 'accommodates' himself to live among sinners, an Old Testament anticipation of Jesus."³⁶ The pre-incarnate Christ saved them in the Red Sea (vs. 11–14).

(5) *In his love* (Heb. *ʾahābâh*), v. 9: The noun love occurs only here in Isaiah. "It is the love which delights in the companionship of the loved one."³⁷ Here is insight into the way God loves in the OT. As Hosea faithfully loved his unfaithful wife, so God faithfully loved (Heb. *hesed*) His unfaithful Judah. This is the stunning contrast presented in this passage. It is while they rebelled that God loved them to this depth, even though He had to punish them to save them (v. 10b onwards).

John Oswalt suggests reading Isaiah 63:7 as:

the way God had demonstrated the fundamental beneficence of his character in all his treatment of Israel. In many ways this is the dominant feature of the entire OT. When Gentile readers (from Marcion onward) look at the OT and see a God of wrath, the OT writers say to us in astonishment, 'Oh no, it's not surprising that God should have gotten angry with us. What is surprising is that he ever cared about us at all, and that he then continued to love us and care for us when we senselessly rejected him.'"³⁸

Isaiah, the gospel prophet, reveals more about the Suffering Servant (Jesus Christ) than any other OT prophet. Likewise, arguably, He presents the Trinity more explicitly than any other OT writer.

The Spirit in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 88 times in the OT, in about half of its 39 books,³⁹ and 325 times in 24 NT books.⁴⁰ Yet you will find that He says very little about Himself. He communicates much about the Father and the Son. This is an insight into

³⁵ F. Delitzsch, 454.

³⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *The Tyndale OT Commentaries: Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 387.

³⁷ Motyer, *ibid.*

³⁸ Oswalt, 604.

³⁹ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 9.

⁴⁰ Wm. Edward Bleedenwolf, *A Help to the Study of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1936), 17.

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the selfless love in the Trinity, for the Son glorifies the Father (John 17:4), and the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). I can imagine that in heaven before the inhabited planets of unfallen intelligent beings, the Father glorified the Son and the Spirit. For in perfect eternal and reciprocal love, each loves the others more than loving Himself—the very opposite of Satan and those who follow Him. This communion means they do not do things on their own (John 5:22, 27, 30; 10:30, 37, 38; 14:31; 15:10b), so the Son speaks what the Father told Him (John 7:16; 12:49; 15:15), and the Spirit “will speak only what he hears” from Christ (John 16:12–14).

**The Old Testament Relational Trinity
Is the Same as the New Testament Trinity**

If God is love by nature (1 John 4:8),⁴¹ which is documented in the sampling of OT texts examined above, then the God of the OT is the same as the God of the NT. What God is in His revelation in history is what God is like in His own inner-Trinitarian being. God’s acts of love issue from His nature as love. God could not be solitary and be love, for an eternal existence of God by Himself before the first creation would not be the same as a Trinity. The fact that the Trinity lived for eternity with each other before creating indicates that their mutual love for one another needed none other. It means that there is a reciprocal love relationship within the Trinity so that each loves the other two with a love that is eternal and divine.

The NT speaks of the relational Trinity as follows: (1) Mutual indwelling. Christ says the Spirit will come to the disciples and adds, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). So Christ says He will come to them through the Holy Spirit. At the same time Christ prayed for Christian unity “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21a). (2) The Trinity is a relationship of equals who have different functions in the plan of salvation. The Father prepared a body for Christ, and Christ came to do the will of His Father (Heb 10:4–7), to reveal Him (John 14:9), and to

⁴¹ John also says “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and “God is spirit” (John 4:24). These are three Johannine declarations on the nature of God. Because the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22, 23), that fruit is manifested in all God does, so that He is light and reveals light in a way compatible with His love. Light and love speak of His character. “God is spirit” describes His metaphysical nature. For further discussion, see I. Howard Marshall, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Epistles of John*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 212, 213.

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speak His words (John 17:8a). But in carrying out this mission Christ said, “it is the Father living in me, who is doing his works” (John 14:10b), and speaks of His Father as “you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21a); (3) With respect to sending the Spirit, Christ said, “When the Counselor comes, *whom I will send to you* from the Father, the Spirit of truth *who goes out from the Father*” (John 15:26).

In the NT the Spirit is given titles never ascribed to Him in the OT. He is “Spirit of His Son” (Gal 4:6), “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9, 1 Pet 1:11), and “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19). W. H. Griffith Thomas could therefore say, “It is not in His Absolute Being, but as the Spirit of Christ that He is revealed in the New Testament.”⁴² H. B. Swete concludes that the Spirit is Christ’s “second Self.”⁴³

Why is the Spirit’s new name associated with Christ? He is the “Spirit of Jesus” because He brings Jesus to Christians. Jesus promised, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (John 14:18); and “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20, NKJV). Furthermore, the Spirit is called the “Spirit of Jesus” because His mission is Christ-centered. Jesus said, “the Father will send [the Holy Spirit] in my name” (John 14:26). The “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13) comes to reveal the one who is “the truth” (John 14:6). Jesus said the Holy Spirit would “testify about me” (John 15:26) and “will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 14:26). He “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

Human beings were created to be temples for the indwelling of God (1 Cor 3:16). Christ’s work, both in heaven’s sanctuary and in human temples, applies the results of Christ’s atonement sacrifice for and in humans. So the application of Calvary is made in the heavenly sanctuary by Christ and in human temples by the “Spirit of Christ.”

From the examination of the OT texts above, it is clear that divine love is shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit in the OT in a reciprocal relationship beyond human comprehension. It will take another paper to explore the covenant relationship of God in the OT as the same as His covenant love in the NT. Suffice it to say, the OT God of love—who is the same as the NT God of love (Mal 4:6; Heb 13:8)—acted in the history of Israel/Judah with profound grace and suffered grief. God’s *hesed*

⁴² Griffith Thomas, 141.

⁴³ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1909), 300.

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covenant faithfulness continued even though rejected by Israel/Judah. Creation of humans in the image of God (Gen 1:26, 27) meant that Adam and Eve's relationship with one another was to reflect the relationship among the Trinity. After the fall of humans, God's covenant with humans was to restore the relationship with Him and with one another so human love to some degree could reflect the reciprocal love among the Trinity. The suffering Servant of Isaiah 52, forecasting the pain of Christ becoming a substitute for human sins, crushing out His life, opens up the depths of God's love for humans as much as any NT passage:

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows . . . he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken . . . he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. (Isa 53:2b–4a, 5–8, 12b)

Conclusion

Even the *Shema* (God is one, Deut 6:4), stressing the uniqueness of God (compared to polytheism), didn't use the word *one as unique* (Heb. *yāhîd*) but *one as united* (Heb. *'ehād*), thereby indicating unity of persons. We noted that there are several OT texts indicating a plurality in God, as one God addresses another God. The pre-incarnate Christ often acts in OT history as the "angel of the Lord" and reveals His same *hesed* love (OT) as His *agapē* love (NT). The continuity of a relational God in both Testaments counters the idea that the OT God is different from the NT God (which if true would aid the cosmic controversy against God). The data supports the biblical claims: "I the Lord do not change" (Mal 4:6) and "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). Although the Trinity is more implicit in the OT and explicit in the NT, we have noted that: (1) the *sola scriptura* hermeneutic indicates that

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Christ understood the Trinity to be present in the OT; and (2) Isaiah, the gospel prophet who reveals the suffering Servant Christ as no other OT prophet, also presents the Trinity with greater specificity than any other OT writer.

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