



Christian Apologetics Project

THE TRINITY

A Defense of God's Being

Paul Derengowski, ThM

©2011 Christian Apologetics Project. All Rights Reserved.

The Trinity

Paul Derengowski, ThM

“The Word Trinity is not in the Bible?” “If Jesus was God, then who was he talking to in the Garden when he prayed?” “The Trinity was started by the Roman Catholic Church.” “Trinitarianism teaches polytheism.” “If Jesus didn’t know the day, or the hour, of the end of the world, then how could he be God?” “The Holy Spirit is God’s active force; he’s not a person.” Critics of the Trinity have asked these kinds of ill-conceived questions and made these kinds of shortsighted statements over the years to try and refute the biblical doctrine known as the Trinity. They are ill-conceived due to a lack of biblical observation; they are shortsighted due to a lack of willingness to listen. Although most critics reading this article will hardly become more observant or receptive to the explanations offered, there are some who will look beyond their prejudicial biases to the point of comprehension, and it is them whom this article is devoted.

The Trinity itself essentially states that God is one *being*, but is comprised of three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Being means that which exists in reality as opposed to that which does not exist or is contrary to reality. The study of being is known as ontology, and it is the ontological aspect of the Trinity that is being defended here. Each person in the being of God is co-equal and co-eternal, or shares in that which is essential to what it means to be God. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, therefore, are omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (present everywhere), omnibenevolent (all-good), omniscient (all-wise) immutable, infinite, loving, just, and creative to list just a few essential qualities that make up the essence of God’s being. Humans may partake in some of these same qualities, having been created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27; 2 Pet. 1:4), but only do so in a finite or limited way. Humans can never become God, however, given that their essential constitution is finite and contingent upon God’s infinity and self-sufficiency. Because each person in the triune Godhead shares in the essentials of what it means to be God, they are deity in absolute fullness of everything that the word “God” entails.

Since a few criticisms have been offered above, whether in question or statement, we will take a look at them first, and then proceed to show from both the Old and New Testaments where the Trinity doctrine is derived and can be defended. Then we will look at a few of the common heretical notions that have been offered as alternatives to the Trinity, why they are inadequate to explain the relationship in the Godhead, and how they are often erroneously attributed to Trinitarians in an effort to refute the Trinity. Finally, we will look at whether or not the Nicene Creed, which is a favorite target of Trinity critics, has any biblical merit. Is it purely a manmade doctrine, or does it merely restate what is already found in the Bible? If the former answer is yes, then the Creed should be abandoned. Conversely, if the latter answer is yes, then the critic’s argument is not with man, but with God, and the critic’s argument should be abandoned.

Whatever the case, the current arguments against the Trinity are not novel; they have been around for a long time and have been regurgitated to suit the contemporary climate. That said, let us now look at those criticisms to see just how much warrant they either have or lack.

Critical Arguments Against the Trinity

The Word “Trinity” is Not in the Bible

A common fallacious argument from silence used by critics to refute the Trinitarian nature of God is the trite explanation, “The Trinity is not in the Bible!” Perhaps one reason why the critics frequently turn to such a conclusion is because on the surface it sounds so convincing. After all, if something is not mentioned in the Bible, then it cannot exist. Moreover, if God thought He existed in Trinity, and He really thought it was important enough for humans to know about it, He would have let the authors and readers of the Bible know in no uncertain terms that He did so. He would not mince words on such an important topic, in other words. Yet, since He has not, then the Trinity does not exist. But, is such an argument really convincing, given that there are a whole host of others words that do not appear in the Bible, but the concepts are readily apparent?

While it is agreed that the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, neither does the word Bible itself! “Book” appears in both the Old and New Testaments under different words—Heb. *sepher* and Gr. *biblos*—but using the critic’s argument from silence, those are hardly the same words as the English word “Bible.” Therefore, following the argument from silence that the critic has chosen to employ in his effort to refute the Trinity to its logical end, the Bible does not exist! Yet, one would search in vain to find a Trinitarian critic who is consistent enough to allow such a specious bit of reasoning to be used of the Bible, since he knows, as well as any other rationally minded person, that the Bible does exist, regardless if the word “Bible” actually appears in the Bible. The same principle applies to the Trinity.

If one took the critic’s line of argumentation one step further, and depending on the English Bible version one uses, there are several other beliefs and doctrines that early and later Christians subscribed to, which words do not exist in the Bible either. Words such as “sermon,” “communion,” “penance,” “existence,” “omnipotence,” “omniscience,” “omnipresence,” “omnibenevolent,” “immutable,” “finite,” “universe,” “planet,” “morality,” “independence,” and “theology,” are just a few. Yet, if anyone has ever read the Bible (the book that does not exist if one follow’s the anti-Trinitarian critic’s line of thinking), one will be hard-pressed to argue that since “sermon” does not appear in the Bible, that Jesus’ *Sermon* on the Mount does not exist. Or, since the word “communion” does not appear in the Bible, then none of the Christian churches partook of communion. Or, that because the word “morality” does not appear in the non-existent Bible, that the early Christians were immoral because morality did not exist!

The fact is, though, all of the preceding concepts do exist *in the Bible*, including the Bible itself (2 Tim. 4:13)! For what is really important when it comes to biblical doctrines, and whether or not they exist, is not whether a specific English word appears in the biblical text, but whether the concept does. For example, the concept of God’s omnipotence is clearly taught in Scripture (Gen. 17:1; Rev. 21:22), even though the word “omnipotent” is missing. The same applies to “communion” (1 Cor. 11:20), “existence” (Jn. 1:3), and the soon to be seen “Trinity.” Therefore, the fallacious argument from silence that some critics use to try and refute or confuse Christians concerning the Trinity should be treated as a fallacy: the fallacy of the argument from silence. It is easily exposed as such if one will only argue that what is important is if the concept is present, even if the specific English word is absent, and then proceed to demonstrate the presence through careful, thoughtful explanation.

The Jesus Can’t Be God Argument

Those who not only doubt the reality of the Trinity, but Jesus’ deity as well, frequently raise this unfounded argument. It is not uncommon for a Jehovah’s Witness, for instance, to ask: “If Jesus was God, then who was he praying to on the cross? Himself?” The argument is that (1) there is only one God; (2) Jesus is God; (3) Therefore Jesus was praying to himself, which does not make “reasonable” sense. While the argument itself is sound, the conclusion is invalid due to a faulty attribution of what is known as *modalism* onto Trinitarian thought. Trinitarians, though, are not Modalists.

Modalism, or what has sometimes been known as Sabellianism or Modalistic Monarchianism, is the idea that there is only one God who at different times changed modes of appearance to represent different persons when needed. Therefore, depending on the circumstance, God could take on the mode of the Father, while at other times he could become the Son. When he existed as neither the Father, nor the Son, he could become the Holy Spirit. At all times, though, he was the same person, showing no distinction. He merely changed faces, so to speak, when necessity arose. “Logically,” as Harold O. J. Brown points out, “modalism makes the events of redemptive history a kind of charade. Not being a distinct person, the Son cannot really represent us to the Father. Modalism must necessarily be Docetic and teach that Christ was human in appearance only; the alternative, on the basis of modalistic presuppositions, is that God himself died on the Cross. Since such an idea is considered absurd—except by death-of-God theologians—the normal consequence is the conclusion that while Christ was fully God, he only appeared to be man.”¹

Yet, such thinking is obviously at odds with the Scriptural revelation concerning the persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Not only does Scripture teach that all three persons in the Godhead are distinct, they, as in the example used above, often communicate

¹ Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 99.

with one another as distinct persons. Jesus, then, while suffering on the cross, was communicating with His Father, and not talking to himself at all. Jesus, in other words, was not merely another mode of God directing meaningless speech to a vacant heavenly abode. Moreover, he was not merely a man in appearance, as the Docetic Gnostics taught, which led to the idea that God was suffering on the cross (*patripassianism*).² Instead, he was God the Son pleading with the God the Father during his hours of agony, while he suffered in the stead of humanity, which only God could do as its Savior (1 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:4; 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1). Once again, Modalism is not Trinitarianism and Trinitarianism is not Modalism. They are mutually exclusive terms and ideas. Therefore, Modalism cannot be used as an argument to refute Jesus' deity, much less the Trinity.

The Trinity Was Started by Roman Catholicism

While Roman Catholicism down through history has much to be blamed for in respect to false doctrine, political tyranny, and rampant immorality, often it is blamed (or credited in this case) for things that it had absolutely nothing to do. Formulating the Trinitarian doctrine is one of them. Typically blame or credit starts with a complete misunderstanding of Roman Catholicism's role at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. with the first error being the belief that Roman Catholicism was in existence at the time, which it was not!

The Council itself was called by the then Roman Emperor Constantine who basically used the gathering to try and unify and stabilize the Roman Empire which was under repeated assaults by foreign entities intent on overthrowing it. Two heavyweight theological figures which continue to impact debate even today, Athanasius and Arius, were contending over just who the person of Jesus was, and that in particular to his relationship with God the Father. Athanasius contended that Jesus was as much God as God the Father and that he was begotten (in the sense of being unique), not made. Arius argued that Jesus was a created being that possessed godlike qualities without actually being God himself. Constantine desired to rectify their disagreement by calling the two parties together and settling it, even though he was wholly ill-equipped to do so. He was a politician, not a theologian. Therefore his interests were primarily geared towards saving the empire, not necessarily appeasing a theological squabble. At no time was what came to be known as the Roman Catholic Church anywhere in sight. In fact, it would not be until the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. that the RCC even came into official existence with Popes Gregory "the Great" and Leo I leadership, the latter of which helped to save the Roman Empire from the Vandal invasion.

Trinitarian doctrine is ultimately the product of biblical exegesis; an exegesis that the Roman Catholic Church proper contributed nothing. Athanasius' motivation during the Nicene debates

² Patripassianism is another ancient heresy which taught that God the Father was actually the one who suffered and died on the cross, rather than Jesus, as God the Son.

was to safeguard Jesus' deity, and explain that deity in association with God the Father, while Arius wished to preserve God's exclusivity and prevent Jesus from being named a second God. The final outcome was that Constantine accepted Athanasius' explanation and Arius and his colleagues were banished, even though afterwards Constantine would change his mind and adopt Arianism and send Athanasius into exile. Later on the RCC would adopt the conclusion of Nicaea, but as far as being a major player, along with Constantine, as an argument to try and refute the Trinity, is to make an assumption based on anachronistic conclusions and historical error.

The Trinity Teaches Polytheism

Trinitarianism is fundamentally a monotheistic belief, which is that there is only one God. Polytheism is the belief that there are multiple gods which exist, sometimes with those deities being of lesser or greater manifestations of power or prestige. To state that the Trinity teaches polytheism and therefore it contradicts the monotheistic view of God found in the Bible is to engage in the fallacy of equivocation, usually with the terms dealing with person and being. Person is not being and being is not person. A person must be a being in order to exist (unless of course that person is a figment of the imagination), but a being does not necessarily have to be a person in order to exist (e.g. rocks and trees have being, but are not persons). Failure to understand the difference between person and being, or to simply equivocate the two, especially when dealing with Trinitarianism, can often lead to the faulty assumption that Trinitarianism is polytheistic.

As argued above, the Trinity is comprised of three persons in one being. God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit are each distinct personalities in the Godhead, but because there is only one God, what is essential to being God is inherent in all three persons. In other words, each person is in infinite possession of that which constitutes the being revealed and understood as deity. Conversely, anything or anyone which or who does not possess the infinitely essential qualities and attributes of deity is not God, nor can it or they ever be God. Infinite and finite states of being cannot change without completely destroying the identity of the person or thing involved. Therefore, when God tells us that He does not change (Mal. 3:6) or the writer to the Hebrews informs us that Jesus is the "same yesterday and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), they are talking about that which is essential to their infinite being. Of course, some might argue that when Jesus became a man that act demonstrated change. Yet, taking on a human nature, as Jesus did, did not change his being, since he was still God.

Therefore, when confronted with this argument to refute the Trinity it is best to simply ask the critic to define and explain his terms. Because as is often the case, the critic is abusing language to promote his criticism, while engaging in fallacious reasoning in the process. Not only does he equate terms that are unequal (i.e. person and being), but then he erects a false view and understanding of what the Trinity represents, just so he can knock it down and claim victory (the

straw man argument). Such need not be the case if one will simply take the time to ask a few questions and point out the errors in the argument, and then systematically explain the Trinitarian doctrine of being and person in the Godhead as revealed from Scripture.

Jesus' Ignorance Disqualifies Him

Jehovah's Witnesses are notorious for using this line of argumentation to try and refute the reality of the Trinity. Sometimes citing Mark 13:32, where Jesus is engaged in an explanation of events that will accompany the end of the current age, they conclude that because he stated, "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father," then not only can he be not God, but that the Trinity cannot exist either. According to the JW's, "Had Jesus been the equal Son of a Godhead, he would have known what the Father knows. But Jesus did not know, for he was not equal to God."³ But the Jehovah's Witnesses, *et al*, are in error on at least two counts: the Bible makes it quite clear that Jesus is God, and Jesus' lack of knowledge of end times events is not a defeater of Trinitarian thought, especially when one considers that Jesus intentionally limited his fully divine nature from time-to-time and allowed his human nature to manifest in its fullness. But first, let us take a look at what the Bible says about Jesus' deity.

Scripture makes it quite clear that Jesus is God. References to his deity start as early as the Book of Genesis, whether in the creation of man (Gen. 1:26) or the angel of the Lord allusions (Gen. 16, 22), the latter of which will be discussed below. The Prophet Isaiah, when speaking of Jerusalem's eventual comfort, made a prediction of Jesus' coming, which all the Gospels record and John the Baptist interpreted to include himself as the forerunner of Jesus. Interestingly when Isaiah wrote and John announced, "A voice is calling, Clear the way for the Lord (Yahweh) in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God (Elohim)," both Yahweh and Elohim were alluding to Jesus (Isa. 40:3 cf. Mt. 3:3; Lk. 3:4-6). Then there is Zechariah's prophetic announcement concerning Yahweh's defense of Jerusalem which is culminated in His "piercing." "They will mourn for Him, as one mourns for any only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born" (Zech. 12:10). John's Gospel sees the fulfillment of this piercing in the crucifixion of Jesus (Jn. 19:37), meaning that the LORD (Yahweh) is Jesus.

When one turns to the New Testament the referential material supporting Jesus' deity is even more explicit.

- Matthew translates Jesus' alternative name, Immanuel, as "God with us" (1:23).
- Mark tells us that Jesus is "God alone" (Mk. 10:18).
- Luke asserts that Jesus is "THE LORD," again alluding to Isaiah 40:3 (Lk. 1:75).
- John declared that Jesus is "the only begotten God" (Jn. 1:18).

³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Should You Believe in the Trinity?" (Brooklyn: WBTS, 1989), 19.

- Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, informs us that God purchased the church “with His own blood,” which is something only Jesus did (Acts 20:28).
- In Romans 9:5, Jesus is the “blessed God forever.”
- First Corinthians tells us that there is not only one God, but that Jesus is the one by which all things are and exist; something that is exclusively reserved for God (1 Cor. 8:6).
- Second Corinthians confidently expresses that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19).
- Galatians greets the reader with grace and peace from God the Father, *and* the Lord Jesus, thereby demonstrating a divine parallel between the two (Gal. 1:3).
- Ephesians shares a similar parallel of love and faith from God, and the Lord Jesus Christ as well (Eph. 6:23).
- Philippians informs the reader that Jesus has existed in the form of God from all eternity (Phil. 2:6).
- Colossians argues that Jesus is the creator of “all things” and that they hold together because of him (Col. 1:16).
- First Thessalonians predicts that God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and then tells the reader that it is none other than Jesus himself who will do the descending to earth from heaven (1 Thess. 4:14, 16).
- Second Thessalonians states that the glorification of the believer comes according to the grace of God, *even* the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:12).
- In First Timothy the Apostle Paul calls Jesus “the only God” (1 Tim. 1:17) and in Second Timothy Paul calls Jesus “our Savior” (2 Tim. 1:10), which in Titus Paul attributes to God (Titus 2:10).
- Hebrews 1:8 informs us that the Son is God is “forever and ever,” which is a declaration of Jesus’ co-eternality with God (Heb. 1:8).
- James, the half-brother of Jesus, opens his epistle by acknowledging that he is not only “a bond-servant of God,” but a bond-servant “of the Lord Jesus Christ” as well (James 1:1).
- Peter declares that Christ is LORD (1 Pet. 3:12-15) in his first letter and “God and Savior” in his second letter (2 Pet. 1:1).
- Of John’s three short epistles, his most definitive statement on Jesus’ deity is found in 1 John 5:20 where he outright declares Jesus to be “God.”
- Jude credits Jesus with the capability of confining unruly spirits in darkness, which is something only God can do (Jude 1:6).
- Finally, in Revelation, Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the “first and the last” (Rev. 1:17; 22:13); a title which is also given to “the Lord God” (Rev. 1:8). These are only a few of the statements found in Scripture regarding Jesus’ deity.

Therefore, to argue that Jesus is not equal to God is to ignore the scriptural evidence and wander into the realm of foolishness.

Nevertheless, when we turn back to Mark 13:32, we see an example of the kind of foolishness that infidelity breeds as the JW's ignore the full context of the scriptural evidence in an effort to use it as an example to disprove the Trinity. Jesus admits that the Son does not know the day, nor the hour, of the appointed time of the end. This is a classic example of Jesus emptying himself (Phil. 2:7), or momentarily subordinating his divine nature to his human nature, whereby he expresses his human ignorance of the future event. At no time did Jesus, in the divine sense, ever not know of the end of the age or the time of his coming, but when acting in his full humanity he was as handicapped as any human being is when knowing certain things. In this particular instance it was the time of the end. Otherwise, "He knew all men...for He Himself knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:24-25) and as the Apostle Peter confessed "You know all things" (Jn. 21:17).

Of course one could ask, "Then how did Jesus know of the signs and events of the Great Tribulation in Mark 13, if he had 'emptied' himself in verse 32 of any knowledge of his coming?" First of all, such a question would not disprove either Jesus' deity or the Trinity, but would in fact be *an implicit admission of both*, for only God knows the future, and in this case it is Jesus who is revealing it. Therefore, a simple two-fold response might be that only Jesus knows for sure when the time was appropriate to subordinate his divine nature, and reveal certain information only privy to God, while at other times pleading ignorant. Mark 13:32 seems to be that time, even though Jesus was quite certain in revealing upcoming events that would only be known by God.

A second response is simply we do not know why Jesus decided to know some things and not others. Such is the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). Yet such an admission does not concede the Jehovah's Witness argument that Mark 13:32 may be used as a proof text to discount either Jesus' deity or the Trinity, for the massive amount of Scriptural evidence to the contrary, as seen above, nixes that notion. It merely acknowledges that there are instances in Scripture where statements are made that are beyond human comprehension, and it is best to confess one's ignorance, than impose a theological error upon Scripture in light of the mountain of evidence to the contrary. In short, Jesus' ignorance of the time of the end in Mark 13:32 does not disqualify him as God, nor can it be used to discount the Trinity, when the full context of the Bible is taken into account regarding his divinity especially in association with his humanity.

The Holy Spirit is NOT a Person

This is another notorious argument mainly raised by those in the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society or Jehovah's Witnesses. The premises typically go something like this: (1) "Spirit" is an abstract personification; (2) The Bible only uses "holy spirit" in an impersonal and general way. Therefore, (3) the Holy Spirit is an impersonal personification, or "active force," and not God at all. And since the Holy Spirit is not a person, as well as not God, then the Trinity cannot be a reality either. But as in all logical arguments, if the premises are not true, then the conclusion

cannot be valid either. When it comes to the idea of the Holy Spirit of the Bible being an impersonal “active force,” the premises are untrue, leading to an invalid assumption.

First of all, it is conceded that there are different abstractions in the Bible which are personified. The Watchtower provides some examples of personifications in an attempt to bolster their argument, but fail to see that personifications, much like analogies, can only be used in a limited way until they begin to fall apart. For instance, the WBTS cites Luke 7:35 and wisdom having children. Obviously wisdom, as an abstraction, is impersonal and cannot conceive children. Only persons can have children. But upon closer inspection, the wisdom spoken of is directly tied to the *person* of God! It is God who is, or will be, vindicated, and that by his children whom He elects, regenerates, and glorifies. God is not an impersonal abstraction and one cannot vindicate an abstract personification, and only it is only when the context of Luke’s statement is ignored that one would argue that an impersonal abstraction is being spoken of rather than the personal God from whom wisdom originates.

Genesis 4:7 is another example the WBTS offers to demonstrate a parallel between another abstraction—sin—and the Holy Spirit. The context is Cain’s offering in contrast to his brother Abel’s. God rejects Cain’s offering and then instructs him to cheer up, so to speak, because if he does not, then “sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Unfortunately for Cain, he rejects God’s counsel and then proceeds to kill his brother. Sin, though, is Cain’s act; it is not something lying around in wait at his doorstep. Therefore, like the reference above, Cain gets the credit for being the basis of his sinful act of murder, not some impersonal abstraction, and there is a fundamental reason why.

Abstractions, by their very nature, stem from something concrete. Theology is a discipline that has been abstracted from a study of the person of God. Bibliology is the abstract principle derived from study of the Bible, Christology (study of Christ), and Pneumatology (study of the Holy Spirit), et cetera. Without a concrete reference point then one cannot have an abstraction, but instead one ends up with a superstitious ideology couched in irrational speculation. Wisdom and sin, as seen in the references to Luke and Genesis, do not make coherent sense by themselves. It is only when they are abstracted from the persons and events of which they are referenced that they make contextual sense. Since the Holy Spirit is the concrete reference point in Pneumatology, then he cannot be the abstraction as well. Now, that does not necessarily mean that he is a person in our discussion, yet. It merely means that for the WBTS, *et al*, to confuse terminology, by asserting that the Holy Spirit, wisdom, sin, and death are all abstractions, is misleading, if not intellectually dishonest.

Also to state that the Holy Spirit is merely an impersonal personification (an expression that borders on contradiction, if not insanity), or “active force,” especially when the Holy Spirit consistently exhibits all the characteristics of being a person, is once again misleading, if not intellectually dishonest. For instance, when the Apostle Paul tells us that “...the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2:10), what would be the point of asserting that an

impersonal personification searches the depths of God, much less that an impersonal personification reveals those things to man, if the Spirit was not a person in the first place? Also, when Jesus promised that upon his departure, he would send the Holy Spirit to act in his stead, how could that have substantive meaning by sending something that was the polar opposite of whom Jesus was, namely a person? The only way Jesus' assurance would make any logical or biblical sense would be to send someone, *not some impersonal thing*, as personally caring as Jesus himself was (Jn. 16:13).

In an odd attempt to rebut the notion of the Holy Spirit's personality the Watchtower actually admits that he speaks, but then attributes the communication to humans, while crediting transmission to the Spirit.⁴ Yet, upon further examination, it is the Spirit himself who does the speaking: "but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matt. 10:20); "for it is not you who speaks, but the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 13:11); "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes... He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (Jn. 16:13); "And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2); "This is what the Holy Spirits says..." (Acts 21:11); "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah..." (Acts 28:25). "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear his voice'" (Heb. 3:7).

Communication on the part of the Holy Spirit is not the only activity or attribute credited to him, though, that further identifies him as a person. The Spirit can be grieved (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30). He enables and accompanies (Ezek. 43:5). He was instrumental in the conception of Jesus (Matt. 1:18, 20; Lk. 1:35). Men can commit blasphemy against him (Matt. 12:32; Mk. 3:29; Lk. 12:10). He has a name synonymous with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19). He reveals God's message or information (Lk. 2:26; Acts 1:16). The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove (Lk. 3:22). He teaches (Lk. 12:12; Jn. 14:26). He convicts the world of sin (Jn. 16:8). He can be lied to (Acts 5:3). He sends missionaries on their missions (Acts 13:4). He opines (Acts 15:28). He forbids (Acts 16:6). He testifies (Acts 20:23; Heb. 10:15). He appoints overseers in the church (Acts 20:28). He sets apart ministers for service (Rom. 15:16). He qualifies the believer to claim Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3) and grants various spiritual gifts to the believer (1 Cor. 12:8-11). He fellowships with the church (2 Cor. 13:14). He seals the believer in Christ (Eph. 1:13). He indwells the believer (2 Tim. 1:14; Rom. 8:9). The Spirit regenerates and renews the sinner, turning him from a sinner into a saint (Tit. 3:5). He indicates that the "holy place has not yet been disclosed" (Heb. 9:8) and he moves men to write Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21). To assert that an impersonal "active force" is responsible for the foregoing examples of obvious personal activity on the part of God is to push an agenda intended to undermine the Bible, not defend it.

Therefore, while it is admitted that there are personifications and abstractions in Scripture, all of which are intended to convey a divine message to the finite human intellect, none of those

⁴ Ibid., 22.

personifications or abstractions can be attributed to the Holy Spirit in the impersonal, “active force” manner that the Jehovah’s Witnesses or other anti-Trinitarians wish. In fact, the whole JW argument is based on bogus premises, meaning that their whole argument itself is invalid. The biblical record is quite clear that the Holy Spirit is a person, that he is deity (Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17), and that because there is only one true God, he must share in the same essential make-up as God the Father and Jesus Christ. Hence, there is a personal Trinitarian relationship in the Godhead, with the Holy Spirit being the third person in that relationship. To continue to adhere to arguments to the contrary, like those found among exponents of the Watchtower, is to defy not only the Bible, but engage in irrational thought as well.

Jesus was God’s Only-begotten Son

This particular argument is often presented in a variety of ways either to discredit Jesus’ deity or as in the case for which this article is written, to try and discredit the reality of the Trinity. It centers on a misunderstanding of what is meant by the Greek term *monogenes*—which is often translated into the English as “only-begotten”—as it applies to the Son of God, a term which scores of articles have been written and much ink expended.⁵ From that misunderstanding whole theologies have been erected which state that Jesus at one point in time did not exist; that Jesus ultimately is a created being who possessed divine qualities without actually being deity. Such was the argument of the ancient heretic Arius that he presented at the Council of Nicaea, which ultimately led to the Nicene declaration that Jesus was “begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

To refute the modern-day Arians one must simply listen closely to their statements, for in their zeal to counter the reality of Jesus’ deity or the Trinity, they inevitably make comments about Jesus’ *monogenes* that are biblically inconsistent, if not logically incoherent. For instance, Mormons will say, amid their enthusiasm, “Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers.”⁶ The naturalistic assumption here is that God the Father came to Mary and sired Jesus’ physical body just like all mortal men do with their wives when conceiving children; prior to that a nebulous “intelligence” was floating about in space that would become Jesus.⁷ Since Jesus is “only-begotten,” then he did not always exist

⁵ Hiebert points out that, “The familiar English rendering ‘only begotten Son’ was based on Jerome’s usage of *unigenitus* in the Vulgate for the Old Latin translation *unicus*.” D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Expository Study of 1 John—Part 8: An Exposition of 1 John 4:7-21,” *BibSac* 147 (Jan-Mar 1990): 584.

⁶ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 547.

⁷ McConkie goes on to state that “There is nothing figurative about his paternity; he was begotten, conceived and born in normal and natural course of events, for he is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says” *Mormon Doctrine*, 742. Although some polemic and/or Internet Mormons vehemently deny God’s role in impregnating Mary in the “normal and natural course of events,” as they make up all kinds of excuses to discredit McConkie—who was a both an Apostle and General Authority of the Mormon Church—their contentions are without merit, given the overall

as Jesus and could not be deity either.⁸ He came to be at a specific point in time when God's sperm fertilized Mary's egg, just like the moment when all human beings come to be.

The first biblical fallacy here is to ignore the revelation that "that which has been conceived in [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit," not God the Father.⁹ Second, Jesus' conception was spiritually miraculous, not naturally produced. Third, such an erroneous view fails to recognize that Jesus existed as Jesus long before he ever took on human flesh (Jn. 17:5; Phil. 2:7). The writer of Hebrews stressed that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), with the idea being that regardless of whether or not Jesus was housed in a physical body of flesh and bones, his essential person and character already existed, unchanged! The logical incoherence involves the faulty assumption that the two worldviews are reconcilable: that Jesus could both eternally exist and not exist at the same time, as well as that Jesus could both be God and not be God, and that Jesus could be created and uncreated. Clearly if Mormon leaders had a proper understanding of just what *monogenes* meant, perhaps they could have avoided so many biblical and logical *faux pas*.

The fact is *monogenes* has nothing to do with a singular generating act whereby Jesus came to be. *Monogenes* has to do with uniqueness, one of kind, or originality. In other words, there are no other Sons of God that are like Jesus, nor will there ever be. What sets him apart from adopted sons and daughters of God is his deity. What sets him apart from the rest of fallen humanity is his sinlessness. He is the God-man par excellence. No one else has ever approached such a lone conception in human existence, that God would fully incarnate in man to bridge the gap between God and man caused by the introduction of sin into the world. Therefore, when one encounters *monogenes* in reference to Jesus one is dealing with a very unique individual who is unprecedented in human history. He is the "*one of a kind* from the Father, full of grace and

naturalistic worldview that Mormonism itself promotes. Personally, I think the average Mormon polemicist understands just how sick the idea is of God marrying his daughter, which some Mormon leaders have espoused, and then impregnating her. Yet, instead of denouncing the sickness, they would rather engage in intellectual dishonesty and denial to justify the sickness.

⁸ Mormons like to mince words on Jesus' existence as Jesus by claiming that he, in fact, always existed, even though he was a nebulous intelligence. Such doublespeak might impress a Platonic crowd of listeners, but for those who know what the Bible says about Jesus' deity, the explanation is nothing more than another heresy being used to cover the previous heresy.

⁹ Former Mormon President Joseph Fielding Smith is almost comedic over his denial of what the Bible says regarding Jesus' conception through the aid of the Holy Spirit. To him the Bible does not teach that the Holy Spirit was responsible for Jesus' conception, even though as noted above, that is exactly what it *does* teach. He confesses, "It is true there is one passage that states so, but we must consider it in the light of other passages with which it is in conflict" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:19). Unfortunately, Smith does not elaborate on exactly just what biblical references are in conflict with Luke's explicit statements. Instead, what he does is merely rehash his conflicted understanding of what God's fatherhood means in with his denunciation and the reader is just supposed to accept it. Such is the nature of the arguments of those whose theology and Christology are warped by the presuppositions they bring to the Bible, rather than allowing the Bible to dictate what their theology and Christology should convey.

truth” (Jn. 1:14), who is also the “*only unique* God, who is in the bosom of the Father” (Jn. 1:18). Moreover, because of his exclusivity, “God so loved the world, that He gave His *only* Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).¹⁰ Finally, 1 John 4:9 tells us that “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God sent His *distinct* Son into the world so that we might live through Him.” It is an understanding of *monogenes* that better fits the biblical data concerning the person of Jesus, which reveals him to be not only one-hundred percent God, but one-hundred percent man as well: a view which is both biblically consistent and logically coherent.

Jesus was God’s First-Created Son

Another favorite argument of anti-Trinitarians, which is commensurate with the preceding point involving Jesus as *monogenes*, is one derived from a misinterpretation and misunderstanding of Colossians 1:15 which reads, “And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.” To those who reject both the Trinity and deity of Jesus—both go hand-in-hand, since one cannot reject one without also rejecting the other—their argument either follow two routes that ultimately lead to the wrong conclusion. One route asserts that the Greek work translated as “first-born,” *prototokos*, is indicative that Jesus was God’s first-created being, who then in turn created all *other* beings and things. That is the Jehovah’s Witness position. The other route asserts that *first-born* means that Jesus is God’s first-born Spirit child in a pre-existent life. That is the Mormon position. But are either one of these explanations justifiable in light of linguistic or contextual understanding of Colossians 1:15? Or are they pre-textual conclusions that have been forced upon Paul’s writing that have been derived from a perverse understanding of the English rendering of “first-born”? A closer examination of the text will prove that it is the latter.

Before one can interpret a text one must understand the background of why the author wrote what he did. The more the observations, the better the interpretation will be. When Paul authored his letter to the Colossians he was obviously trying to quell a heresy making its rounds which attempted to mitigate the significance and person of Jesus Christ. To the Jewish or Hellenistic false teachers Jesus was not who he and others had claimed, namely, that he was one whom deity dwelt in all fullness (Col. 1:19 cf. 2:9), but was a created being of the same order as any human. According to Carson, Moo, and Morris, “...it seems that the false teachers detracted in some way from a high Christology. Evidently they thought that Christ was no more than a

¹⁰ Elsewhere *monogenes* has been translated as simply “only” as well. See Luke 7:12, where Jesus visits the city of Nain and encounters a woman there who had an “only son” who had died, and Luke 8:42, where a man named Jairus confronts Jesus to have him come and heal his “only daughter.” Clearly by translating *monogenes* as “only” in those stories does nothing to distort the context of the narrative, and neither would it distort John 3:16 either, particularly when countering the anti-Trinitarian arguments which attempt to utilize pseudo-linguistic analysis to support a preconceived theology.

beginning; to go on to spiritual maturity, it was necessary to follow their rules and practices.”¹¹ Bruce argued that this group of false teachers was actually “One form of incipient Gnosticism” which proffered a “syncretistic angel-cult of nonconformist Jewish foundation and pagan structure” which led to Paul’s rebuttal in the Colossian epistle.¹² This band of heretics moreover believed that Jesus’ sacrifice was deficient to reconcile one to God, so they set forth to impose legalistic rules upon the believing church whereby they attempted to defraud it of its standing with Christ (2:16-19). Paul stepped in to encourage the Colossian church by warning it about the false teachers and reassuring it that Jesus was much, much more than just another human being, and that for the believer to have been positioned in Jesus by God through the cross of Christ made one complete (1:28; 2:10). It is with such an exaltation of Jesus that Paul makes his statement about him being the *prototokos* or “first-born of all creation” in 1:15; the term that modern-day Gnostics such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons abuse to attack the Trinity and Jesus’ deity, as well subjugate people to their authority.

The term *prototokos* is used eight times in five forms in the New Testament¹³ and 144 times in 11 forms the Septuagint.¹⁴ In the Septuagint it translates the Hebrew word *b^ekôr*, which is understood to mean “first-born” or “first production” of beasts or humans and “first fruits” when pertaining to non-animals and humans.¹⁵ At no time should it be resolved that in each and every instance that *prototokos* or *b^ekôr* is used, that the author merely intended a mundane production of either an animal or human, much less a harvest sacrifice. Context rules as much in the Old Testament as in any other document, and depending on the context will depend on whether the terms have been interpreted correctly. For instance, in Exodus 4:22 Moses asks his father-in-law Jethro to return to Egypt and plea for Israel’s release from Pharaoh’s oppressive bondage. Yahweh informs Moses that He will harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he will not let the people go, and then tells Moses what he must say to Pharaoh: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Israel is My son, My *b^ekôr* (LXX - *prototokos*).’” Clearly Yahweh was not referring to a created being, nor the natural production stemming from his loins. He was referring to a people that were preeminent

¹¹ D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 335.

¹² F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 415-16.

¹³ Lk. 2:7; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 1:6; 11:28; 12:12; and Rev. 1:5.

¹⁴ Gen. 4:4; 10:15; 22:21; 25:13, 25, 31-34; 27:19, 32, 36; 35:23; 36:15; 38:6-7; 41:51; 43:33; 46:8; 48:18; 49:3; Exod. 4:22-23; 6:14; 11:5; 12:12, 29; 13:2, 13, 15; 22:28; 34:19-20; Lev. 27:26; Num. 1:20; 3:2, 12-13, 40-43, 45-46, 50; 8:16-18; 18:15, 17; 26:5; 33:4; Deut. 12:6, 17; 14:23; 15:19; 21:15-17; 33:17; Josh. 6:26; 17:1; Judg. 8:20; 1 Sam. 6:7, 10; 8:2; 14:49; 2 Sam. 3:2; 13:21; 19:44; 1 Kgs 16:34; 2 Kgs 3:27; 1 Chr. 1:29; 2:3, 13, 25, 27, 42, 50; 3:1, 15; 4:4; 5:1, 3, 12; 6:13; 8:1, 30, 38f; 9:5, 31, 36, 44; 26:2, 4, 6, 10; 2 Chr. 21:3; Neh. 10:37; Tob. 5:14; 4 Macc. 15:18; Psa. 77:51; 88:28; 104:36; 134:8; 135:10; Wis. 18:13; Pss. Sol. 13:9; 18:4; Mic. 6:7; Zech. 12:10; Jer. 4:31; 38:9; Ezek. 44:30.

¹⁵ Exod. 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; Lev. 23:17, 20; Num. 28:26; 2 Kgs 4:42; Neh. 10:35; 13:31; Ezek. 44:30.

in His mind as something special or unique. A similar emphasis is seen in Ps. 88:29 where King David is depicted as *b^ekôr* (LXX - *prototokos*).

When one turns to the New Testament, one must again pay close attention to the context. Otherwise one can easily fall prey to pre-textual presuppositions and eisogesis, rather than contextually correct interpretations that are a result of sound exegesis.¹⁶ As mentioned above, *prototokos* (i.e. “first-born”) is used a limited number of times in the New Testament, but with a variety of different meanings. In Luke 2:7 *prototokos* refers to the physical birth of the human Jesus. In Romans 8:9 Jesus serves as the premier example of what the image of God is, and will be for those who are brethren. Of course, the brethren can only be such in an adoptive sense (Rom. 8:15, 23), thereby distinguishing them as “sons” in contrast to the “Son.” In Colossians 1:18 Jesus is the *prototokos* of the dead (see Rev. 1:5), signifying his uniqueness as the first who overcame death through the resurrection. In Hebrews 1:6 Jesus is the *prototokos* whom God brought into the world and then was worshiped by the angels of God; it is something that not only was reserved for God, but demonstrated Jesus’ deity as God. Hebrews 11:28 refers, once again, to the Exodus event, except in this verse the *prototokos* are the children of Egypt whom God destroyed to finally emancipate Israel. We have a completely different understanding of *prototokos* in Hebrews 12:16, for instead of translating it “first-born,” it is translated as “birthright.” This is not unusual, since the first time *prototokos* is translated in like manner is seen in the Old Testament, Genesis 25:31, where Jacob asks Esau to “First sell me your *b^ekôr* (LXX - *prototokos*).”¹⁷ Those who possessed the birthright were considered special and inherited a double portion of the father’s estate. Hebrews 12:23 refers to a heavenly scene where the living God resides along with the church of the *prototokōn*, and Jesus himself. Depending on the context will depend on how the word *prototokos* is used, and it is not used uniformly in either the Old or New Testaments.

The same principle of context applies when we turn to Colossians 1:15. Paul is not only stressing Jesus’ deity, but his preeminence as the one who not only brought all things into being as the Creator, but as the one who sustains his creation as well (v. 17). Jehovah’s Witnesses sometimes like to play mind games at this point by asking questions such as those found in their training manual, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*. They ask, “If that is so [that *prototokos* means “prime, most excellent, most distinguished”], and if the Trinity doctrine is true, why are the Father and the holy spirit not also said to be the firstborn of all creation?” The answer to such a misleading and juvenile question is simply because the context does not warrant it. Elsewhere in

¹⁶ To eisogete a text merely means to read into a passage an interpretation that violates the author’s original intent when grammatical-historical-linguistic considerations are observed. To exegete a text means to consider the grammar, history, and linguistics involved in a passage before arriving at an interpretation that is consistent with the author’s original intent. Once again, the more one observes what is going on in a particular passage or verse, the more accurate an interpretation will be.

¹⁷ Other OT passages where *b^ekôr* (LXX - *prototokos*) is translated “birthright” are Gen. 25:32-34, 26; 27:36; 43:33; 1 Chr. 5:1-2.

Scripture neither God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit were called into question concerning their deity, nor their creative input. Yet, in Colossians 1:15, as noted above, Jesus' character and reputation were both being called into question by the forerunners of Jehovah's Witness thought, and Paul put forth a defense of the person of Jesus to counter their false teaching. Jesus IS "the image of the invisible God" and "by Him all things were created." Jesus, in other words, is the focal point of Paul's defensive statement, not God the Father, nor the Holy Spirit. To Paul Jesus was God, and his past, present, and future works proved it.

When we turn our attention to the Mormon argument, that Jesus was the "first-born" in a previous existence as a "spirit child," the rebuttal is essentially the same, mainly because the Mormons, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, ignore the grammatical-historical-linguistic contexts and forge ahead to prove their pre-textual ideology regardless. Sometimes they even do so by creating their own "Scripture" as proof-texts, since otherwise a careful perusal through Colossians 1:15-ff. prove to be contradictory to their presuppositions. A classic example of this is seen in the book *We Believe: Doctrines and Principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* by Rulon Burton. Under subsection 263, "Jesus Christ is the firstborn spirit son of God," Colossians 1:13-15 is cited to justify the presupposition that Jesus is the byproduct of a sexual union between Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, and that he lived in a queer family setting with all of the rest of humanity prior to coming to earth where he garnered a physical body and became the savior. Burton chose to quote former Mormon Presidents Heber J. Grant, John Taylor, and Joseph F. Smith as the pre-texts leading up to his unjustified biblical proof-text. By doing so he demonstrated that he already had a preconceived notion in mind of what he was wanted the reader to know, and that regardless of what the actual context was in Colossians 1:15. To prove the supposition, please note what Grant, Taylor, and Smith wrote.

We believe absolutely that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, begotten of God, the first-born in the spirit and the only begotten in the flesh; that He is the Son of God just as much as you and I are the sons of our fathers.¹⁸

And was it not His peculiar right and privilege as the firstborn, the legitimate heir of God, the Eternal Father, to step forth, accomplish and carry out the designs of His Heavenly Father pertaining to the redemption, salvation and exaltation of man?¹⁹

There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of human kind. That He is by spiritual birth Brother to the rest of us is indicated in Hebrews: "Wherefore in all things it behoved [sic] him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." (Heb. 2:17) Let it not be forgotten, however, that He is essentially greater than any and all others, by reason (1) of His seniority as the

¹⁸ Rulon T. Burton, *We Believe: Doctrines and Principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Tabernacle, 1994), 326-27.

¹⁹ Ibid.

oldest, or firstborn; (2) of His unique status in the flesh as the offspring of a mortal mother and of an immortal, or resurrected and glorified, Father; (3) of His selection and foreordination as the one and only Redeemer and Savior of the race; and (4) of His transcendent sinlessness.²⁰

Clearly none of what Burton chose to quote has anything to do with the Apostle Paul's argument in Colossians, nor what he intended when he used *prototokos* in the manner that he did. Such heretical nonsense is completely at odds with the immediate context of Colossians 1:15-ff., which reveals that Jesus is not only the Creator of all things, but that by being the Creator of all things he is distinct from them as well. Moreover, he can only be a "brother" to the regenerate by His acceptance of them through redemption, not because two exalted human beings, one of which relied on the other to call her forth from the grave, pulled up their bootstraps and did all the legalistic things necessary to *become* a god and a goddess, and then proceeded to consummate their "time and all eternity" marriage by conceiving a spirit child called "Jesus."

Therefore, was Jesus God's first-created Son, especially if one cites Colossians 1:15 as a proof-text? Hardly. *Prototokos*, or "first-born," does not mean "first created." In fact, there are no reputable translations which translate *prototokos* as such, and there are no reputable Greek lexicons which reveal such an understanding either. Jesus, as the *prototokos* of God, is the preeminent one, the one credited with bringing creation into existence, which is something only God could do. Without him nothing would exist that does exist (Jn. 1:3). And since Jesus is the foremost instrument that brought all things to be, that would exclude him from being one of those things, particularly when one considers the rest of the biblical evidence which points to Jesus as the Creator. Moreover, since Jesus is God, and there is only one true God (Jn. 17:3), then the only plausible explanation to account for his deity, as well as God and the Holy Spirit's, is that there is a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, and that attempts to distort that reality by anti-Trinitarian groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons can only be explained by a total ignorance of the biblical text through a prejudicial mishandling of it.

Jesus never claimed to be God

A final argument raised by critics of the Trinity, although several others could be addressed, once again involves the person of Jesus Christ and the allegation that he never claimed to be God. Typically those who present this argument are careful to be not too disparaging of Jesus, so the commentary usually grants him a certain degree of feigned respect, while totally robbing him of his dignity through their disingenuousness. False teachers, such as the Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses, pay tribute to Jesus as a great humanitarian and spokesman for Allah or Jehovah, but that is as far as it goes. Jesus was not God, he never claimed to be God, and

²⁰ Ibid.

therefore extending their logic to its end, the Trinity cannot be true either. But, he was a great guy otherwise!

An example of just how insincere this approach can be to try and discredit Jesus and the Trinity is found in the Qur'an itself. In Surah 4:171 we read the following:

O People of the Book!
Commit no excesses
In your religion: nor say
Of Allah aught but the truth.
Christ Jesus the son of Mary
Was (no more than)
A Messenger of Allah.
And His Word,
Which He bestowed on Mary,
And a Spirit proceeding
From Him: so believe
In Allah and His Messengers.
Say not "Trinity": desist:
It will be better for you:
For Allah is One God:
Glory be to Him:
(Far Exalted is He) above
Having a son. To Him
Belong all things in the heavens
And on earth. And enough
Is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.²¹

Note that Jesus is the "son of Mary," "A Messenger of Allah," and His Word is to be believed. Nevertheless, he was no more than a messenger. He was not God, much less the Son of God; the Trinity is untrue, therefore, one should "desist." It is a typical backhanded compliment of Jesus, whereby there is lauding at the front end, only to be followed by denigration at the back end. In fact Abdullah Yusuf Ali offers commentary which is instructive in terms of just what the anti-Trinitarian Muslim assumes when reading Surah 4:171. Ali wrote,

Christ's attributes are mentioned: (1) that he was the son of a woman, Mary, and therefore a man; (2) but a messenger, a man with a mission from Allah, and therefore entitled to honour; (3) a Word bestowed on Mary, for he was created by Allah's word "Be" (*kun*), and he was; 3:59; (4) a spirit proceeding from Allah, but not Allah: his life

²¹ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 9th ed. (Beltsville, MD: Amana, 1989), 239-40.

and his mission were more limited than in the case of some other Messengers, though we must pay equal honour to him as a Prophet of Allah. The doctrines of Trinity, equality with Allah, and sonship, are repudiated as blasphemies. Allah is independent of all needs and has no need of a son to manage His affairs. The Gospel of John (whoever wrote it) has put in a great deal of Alexandrian and Gnostic mysticism round the doctrine of the Word (Greek, Logos), but it is simply explained here.²²

Yet, despite all of this, is it true that Jesus never claimed to be God? Is it true that Jesus was just a messenger of God, and nothing more? Is it true that Jesus was merely a man, and that was it? Is it true, as the Jehovah's Witnesses often argue, that Jesus was a separate, lesser being from God, therefore, he could only be God's servant, but not God himself? And since Jesus was only a servant, then the Trinity cannot be true? The answer to each of these specious questions is a resounding NO! But only the first question needs to be answered to put all the rest to bed.

Jesus not only claimed to be God, but produced fruit to back up his claims. Now, that does not mean that Jesus came right out and said, "I am God; come worship me." Instead, he would say things like, "I am" (Gr. *ego eimi*) repeatedly throughout the New Testament, in references to specific questions and comments, which was an Old Testament designation exclusively reserved for Yahweh which denoted His self-existent, self-sufficient being; the one who is constant and unchanging throughout all eternity (cf. Ex. 3:14; Heb. 13:8).²³

The first example where Jesus claimed to be "I am" is found in Matthew 14:27. In it the disciples are at sea, in the evening, when a storm arises. Between 3-6 a.m., while the waves are turning and tossing the disciples in their boat, Jesus comes walking along on the water, whom the disciples assume is a ghost. Jesus alleviates their worry by saying, "Take courage, I am (*ego eimi*); do not be afraid." "In all three Gospels Jesus identifies himself with the words 'it is I,'" comments Morris, "employing the emphatic pronoun commonly used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament where God is the speaker."²⁴ Although, as Morris continues, Jesus' comment may have been natural under the circumstances—he merely wanted to assure the disciples that he was no ghost—"the expression has overtones of deity, and who but God could walk on the stormy waters? At least Matthew is giving us a hint that Jesus was more than a mere man." In

²² Ibid., 239.

²³ Berkhof points out that the "I am that I am" translation of אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי (LXX ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν) at Exodus 3:14 "is not so much the unchangeableness of His essential Being that is in view, as the unchangeableness of His relation to His people. The name contains the assurance that God will be for the people of Moses' day what He was for their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It stresses the covenant faithfulness of God, is His proper name *par excellence*...and is therefore used of no one but Israel's God." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 49. Later Berkhof would add that God's immutability is "a necessary concomitant of His aseity," and then cite Ex. 3:14 in support of both. Aseity is a Latin word meaning self-existence. See the CAPRO article "The Independence of God: A Christian Versus Mormon Contrast," where the God of the Bible, who is *a se*, is contrasted with the Mormon god, which is contingent and dependent.

²⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 382.

the parallel account found in John 6:20, Köstenberger notes that *ego eimi* “is Jesus’ self-identification to his disciples,” but then echoes Morris by stating, “there may be overtones of epiphany (“I am” is God’s name in the OT; see Exod. 3:14), especially in light of Jesus’ walking on the water.”²⁵

A second example of Jesus’ declarative *ego eimi* is found in Mark 14:62.²⁶ Jesus is standing trial before a kangaroo court of Jewish scribes and religious leaders just prior to his crucifixion. After a series of failed attempts to discredit him through false testimony, the high priest pointedly asks Jesus “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus candidly responds with, “*ego eimi*” or “I am,” and then goes on to prophecy of his Second Coming, and that all those about to kill him will be present to see his return! With such an affirmation tied in with Jesus’ further annunciation as the “Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power,” Jesus made it so plain to his persecutors that their immediate response was to accuse him of blasphemy and then sentence him to death, meaning that even they understood him to mean that he claimed to be God! In fact, earlier in Jesus’ ministry they accused him of the same thing and wanted to execute him then (Jn. 5:18; 10:33), but in Jesus’ sovereign providence, it was not his time to yield to them (Jn. 7:30; 8:20). In Mark 14:62 it was his time; a time only God could control.

When one turns to the Gospel of John one is confronted with a series of “I am” statements. Several are qualified, such as those in John 6:35, when Jesus claims, “I am the bread of life,” or in John 8:12 where Jesus states, “I am the light of the world.”²⁷ Yet, it is the unqualified statements that Jesus makes which say more about his divine character and association with God than those where he elaborates by analogy and metaphor. For example, in John 8:12-30 an exchange takes place between Jesus and the Pharisees over his identity. Their accusation was that it was not possible that Jesus could be telling the truth in terms of his self-testimony, because he was acting alone. In their mind it was a breach of Mosaic Law (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). Jesus’ rebuttal was that he was not acting alone, but rather that God the Father was with him (Jn. 8:29). His identity with the Father is made unmistakably clear when he assures them that unless they believe that “I am” (*ego eimi*), then they will die in their sins. Ironically they turn right around and ask him “Who are You?” to which John writes, “They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father” (v. 27). Jesus, in other words, by claiming to be “I am” was not only speaking of his divinity—as the one who would forgive sin by believing in him—but of

²⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 205.

²⁶ Matthew records Jesus as saying, “You said it” or “Σὺ εἶπας” which is equally emphatic. Either way, Jesus was affirming with extraordinary confidence that he was not only the Christ, but the Son of God as well, both of which point to his deity. In fact, later in Mark, Jesus answers Pilate’s question concerning Jesus as the King of the Jews with the same, short, emphatic response, “You said it!” except he uses the Greek phrase “Σὺ λέγεις.”

²⁷ See also John 10:7, 11 where Jesus is the “door of the sheep” and 10:14 as “the good shepherd”; 11:25 as “the resurrection”; 14:6 as “the way, the truth, and the life”; and 15:1, 5 as “the true vine.”

his unity with the Father (v. 29), which John clearly understood and the Pharisees completely missed. In fact, it would not be until after, and in some cases long after, the Pharisaic crowd had put Jesus to death that they would finally realize just who he was (v. 28). The same can be said of the anti-Trinitarian crowd of today in the sense that they will not realize who Jesus really is until long after the judgment; a time when it will be too late.

Later in the same chapter, John 8, Jesus makes another *ego eimi* declaration that has caused groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses to completely pervert the biblical text itself in an effort to prevent the reader from concluding that Jesus is God. The context of Jesus's statement centers on the Jewish accusations that first, Jesus is not a true Jew: he's a Samaritan (v. 48). Also, given that he is a half-breed—which is how the Jews looked at the Samaritans²⁸—they extend the insult to include that he is demon-possessed! Although Jesus does not deal with the first accusation—even though he was no Samaritan—he does the second, reiterating that those who keep his word will not see death (cf. Jn. 8:31). The Jews, being incensed by the come-back, then question Jesus' authority by asking if he preceded Abraham and the prophets, given that they believed and spoke for God, and yet died. Just who did Jesus think he was? Jesus' response not only reveals his motivation, to glorify the Father, but Abraham's demeanor in looking for Jesus' revelation. Jesus existed before Abraham, in other words, and Abraham was looking forward to the day when Jesus would be incarnated in the flesh! Incredulous, the Jews reply with, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" To which Jesus responds, and all credible English translations correctly render, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, *I am*," not "I have been," as the *New World Translation* of the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society has rendered it.²⁹ The Jewish response was to pick up stones to stone him, which was the

²⁸ "When the Samaritans are considered racially and religiously, the evident need for unlocking the door of the gospel to them comes into clear view. They were a people of mixed origin, formed by intermixture with foreign people brought in from various lands to take the place of the expatriated Israelites. Fusing with the Israelites left in the land, they were a racial hodge-podge, a mongrel breed-half Israelitish, half Gentile." Merrill Frederick Unger, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Part 3," *BibSac* 101:404 (Oct 1944), 485. The Jewish historian, Josephus, notes on multiple occasions where the Samaritans were a constant problem for the Jews, at times melding with them when the opportunity was favorable, while at other times denying that they were Jews and causing them trouble (see *Antiquities*, 9.14.3; 11.4.9; 11.8.6; 12.5.5; 20.6.1—William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987).

²⁹ "I am" is an emphatic present active indicative verb which shows linear activity that has no definite beginning. Robertson calls it a "Progressive Present," or a verb describing "the present of past action still in progress"—A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 879. Although the "progressive present" has been translated into English with "have been"—as seen in the *New World Translation* that the Jehovah's Witnesses use—that is the fault of the English, argues Robertson, because the English is unable to fully capture the effect of the Greek. Jehovah's Witnesses would have one believe, therefore, that Jesus merely existed in a past life and then give the verb involving his existence a perfect idea—which denotes a starting point with continuing effects; a "historical present," they would call it; yet that is erroneous when applied to John 8:58—rather that a continuous state that had no beginning, which is what John is alluding to when the full context is considered. "In Jo. 8:58 εἰμι is really absolute," Robertson concludes,

prescription for blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), meaning that they once again understood his claim to be deity. “Jesus is saying things that only God should say. On the assumption that he has no right whatsoever to speak this way, the Jews are scandalized.”³⁰

Another significant *ego eimi* statement by Jesus which emphasizes his deity is found John 13:19. The context is about servitude. Jesus had just finished washing the disciple’s feet as an example that those with greater authority and position are also those who ought to be the greatest servants. Moreover, Jesus seizes the opportunity to exercise his omniscience, which only God possesses, to predict that one of his disciples will betray him (vv. 18, 21). It is because of Jesus’ prediction that he says in verse 19, “From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am (*ego eimi*).” The disciples look at each other with stunned incredulity, and elsewhere it is recorded that they actually begin to inquire of Jesus which one it is that he is talking about (Mt. 26:22; Mk. 14:19; Lk. 22:23). Jesus proceeds to reveal the guilty party, but it is his *ego eimi* assertion that he really wants them to remember, since only belief in the great “I am,” who knows the future, is the same one who will prepare them for the event to come, namely his crucifixion, as well as their redemption, which only God can provide.

A final *ego eimi* declaration is found three times in John 18:5-6, 8. It is a profound passage attesting to the inherent power of Jesus when he admits to his infinite character as the “I am.” The setting is Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to his crucifixion. Judas Iscariot has led a band of Roman soldiers, along with a group of Jewish leaders, to take Jesus by force. It is early in the morning, so it is dark and hard to physically identify the characters in the garden. Prior to their arrival Judas indicated that he would kiss Jesus as a sign to the soldiers of whom to arrest (Mt. 26:48). In John’s narrative Jesus knows all things about to happen (Jn. 19:4), once again indicating his omniscience; an attribute that only belongs to God. The account is straightforward, lacking the detail found in the other Gospels, as Jesus asks “Whom do you seek?” Their response was “Jesus the Nazarene,” to which Jesus confesses “I am” (*ego eimi*). Although Jesus could have simply been coolly and calmly acknowledging that he was the person they were looking for, the power of his confession is so profound that it causes the cohort to draw back or retreat and fall to the ground! Apparently while they are still sitting on the ground, or picking themselves up, Jesus asks them again who they are looking for, and they reply one more time, “Jesus the Nazarene.” Jesus’ second response is the same: “I am” (*ego eimi*); except this time, after Peter cuts off a high priest’s ear, the Roman guards arrest Jesus to be tried. The point, though, is that between Jesus’ keen knowledge of impending events and those involving his confession, he demonstrated that he was much more than just a man. He announced that he

meaning that when Jesus claimed to be the “I am,” he was not merely referring to a prehuman existence, that before a specific moment in time he did not exist. He was the eternally existing One, which Wallace demonstrates that even the Jehovah’s Witnesses negatively admit, when their prejudicial assumption that ἐγώ εἰμι is a “historical present” verb is grammatically is found wanting. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 530-31.

³⁰ D. A. Carson, “The Gospel According to John,” *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 358.

was God, just like he had before on numerous occasions, and that in itself would become the main ingredient in the Jewish effort to put him to death.

Transition from Defense to Offense

From the preceding we now turn to the biblical evidence for the Trinity. Although anti-Trinitarian critics often bluster that the Trinity is missing from the Bible, or that the Trinity received its start in some dark, mysterious council held back in the Middle Ages, the fact is, the Trinitarian nature of God has its beginning in the Old Testament and then is more fully revealed in the New Testament with the advent of Jesus Christ. And while Old Testament references are not nearly as numerous as those found in the New, they are no less significant, because an Old Testament understanding of God's triune nature lays the foundation upon which the New is more fully erected. The passages we will examine are not comprehensive, nor are they exhaustive. They are merely a fair sampling of what is available to those who wish to see the objective evidence that counters the criticism of those who wish to keep their eyes prejudicially closed.

The Old Testament passages to be considered are Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 33:6, Isaiah 48:16 and 63:10-14. What will be pointed out are the themes and subjects involved in those passages which show the activity of diverse persons in the Godhead as they work together in unison to accomplish whatever purpose the context speaks. Other passages involving the subject center on the person of the "angel of the Lord" or "angel of God." Some either falsely assume that the angel is merely another subordinate creature, but upon closer inspection, the angel actually demonstrates traits and characteristics that are consistent with deity. Therefore, an examination of the relevant passages dealing with this particular angel will be included in the evidence that the Old Testament reveals the Trinitarian nature of God.

After perusing through the Old Testament we will look at numerous New Testament passages where the Trinity is so explicit, that to miss the revelation is to completely miss the Bible. Not every passage will be exegeted, for that would require a book-length project in itself. Instead, passages such as Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19-20, Luke 2:25-ff., John 14:26, Romans 8:1-9, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Hebrews 6:1-4, 1 Peter 1:2, Jude 20-21, and Revelation 22:16-18 will serve as a broad baseline which demonstrates that every New Testament author, except for James, taught the Trinity. So, without further introduction, let us take a look at what the Old Testament has to say about God in Trinity.

The Trinity in the Old Testament

Genesis 1:26-27

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’

“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Our first point of reference connecting the Trinity to the Old Testament is found in the opening verses of the creation narrative. In it a discussion is taking between God (*Elohim*) and an unnamed, unidentified party. Some confusion in trying to understand what the author is conveying involves two common misconceptions about this passage. The first deals with the plural use of the word *Elohim* and the second involves the image in which man was created. In the former a “plural of majesty” explanation has been given, which is nothing more than a nebulous phrase that explains nothing, but worse yet, it fails explain who “Us” is or the person whom God is addressing in the verse. Persons such as Gerhard von Rad, who advocates the “plural of majesty” position, have tried to placate those who might object to such a view by claiming that God’s image cannot refer too directly to His creation and that He, therefore, manifests his image in all creatures.³¹ But such an explanation tends to only cause more confusion than provide answers, including, where in the biblical text does it state that angels were created in God’s image? Also, where does it state in the Bible that man was created in the image of an angel? The answers are it doesn’t. Man was created in God’s image, not anyone else, nor anything else. Moreover, nowhere in the Bible does it say that angels were created in the image of God. Therefore, the “plural of majesty” interpretation does nothing to explain the conversation taking place between God and the unidentified party.

The latter question leads us to the second misconception, which implicates the angelic realm into the creation equation of the image of God in man. The problem with such a view is that, once again, the text does not say that man was created in the image of angels, or any other creature, but only of God himself. To the contrary, in Genesis 9:6, one finds a restatement of just who man was created in the image, and it is none other than God. Such a view as angels representing God’s image might appeal to those in Mormonism, who see angels as nothing more than evolved human beings, but given the nature, ministry, and destiny of angels, they could not be the product of human ascent (1 Cor. 6:3). As Dickason comments, “They certainly did not evolve, nor were they formerly men, for they were created *as angels*” [emphasis his],³² meaning that their constitution was different than human beings. Later on, though, in Paul’s letter to the

³¹ G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 57.

³² C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect & Evil* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 23.

Corinthians (2 Cor. 4:4), Jesus Christ is identified as the image of God, which when brought into consideration with Genesis 1:26 provides a plausible explanation of who God was talking to.

Some have argued that one cannot read a Trinitarian explanation back into the creation narrative, because the author had no idea what God was talking about as the author wrote down the words. While it is granted that Old Testament authors probably had no conception of the Trinitarian existence of God, and that proper hermeneutical method precludes multiple correct interpretations, the Bible itself is a continuous whole, not a fragmentation of disjointed and contradictory parts. Scripture, as a part of consistent interpretation of God's mind and intent, should be compared with scripture, so long as the context warrants, as a part of the observation process, in an effort to arrive at an interpretation that is consistent and meaningful. We know, as will be seen in our perusal through subsequent verses and passages that God exists in Trinity. Therefore, given the numerous references cited above dealing with Jesus' and the Holy Spirit's deity, the fact that man was created in God's image, and that Jesus is the image of God, is to understand God to be speaking with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1:26 as the "Us." Not only is such a conclusion a sound interpretation, but it is sound biblical theology as well.

Psalm 33:6

"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host."

At first glance Psalm 33:6 seems like nothing more than a declaration concerning God's sovereignty as it relates to His creation activity. Yet when one takes a closer look at the individual components which comprise the verse, the Trinity begins to come into view. Nevertheless, as is consistent with sound hermeneutics, one must start with the immediate context and then broaden the search for understanding by comparing Scripture with Scripture. Although the writer of Psalm 33—who is left unnamed—is unaware of those persons in the Godhead that later writers would identify as characteristic of the Trinity, he certainly leaves the reader with the raw verbiage necessary to lead to such a deduction: verbiage that is used elsewhere in the Old Testament that speaks of Yahweh.

For instance, when the Psalmist opens with "By the word of the LORD" (Heb. *bidabar Yahweh*), one might suppose that he is merely referring to a statement made by God which led to the creation of the heavens. Genesis 1:1 reveals that God spoke the heavens and earth into existence. Yet elsewhere in Scripture "the word of the LORD" is more than just a vibration in the air produced by the voice of God. It is actually a person who moves about as God's being. In Genesis 15:1 "the word of the LORD" comes to Abram in a vision, and then in verse 4 comes to Abram and speaks to him. Similar occurrences of "the word" coming and speaking to people are found in 1 Samuel 15:10, where Samuel is notified of God's displeasure over the appointment of Saul as the King of Israel, as well as, 2 Samuel 7:4, when Nathan is told to inform David that He would make him and his kingdom a house, as opposed to David building Him one. Later in Jeremiah, the prophet is told by "the word of the LORD" that it is He, "the word," that formed Jeremiah in the belly long before he was consecrated and appointed as His prophet (Jer. 1:4-5).

The most prolific number of examples of “the word of the LORD” coming and addressing someone is found in the Book of Ezekiel, where the expression is found 50 times. In 3:16 “the word of the LORD” appoints Ezekiel to be a watchman for Israel, and to warn the Israelites of their wickedness, with the prospect that they will repent. Failure on the part of Ezekiel will result in their blood being placed on his hands. Similar admonitions are found throughout the rest of the book. It is not until one turns to the New Testament, though, that one finds out just who “the word” is, and it is none other than Jesus himself, whom John identifies as God (Jn. 1:1).

Two individuals present in Psalm 33:6, therefore, are “the word,” who is later revealed as Jesus, and the LORD, who is Yahweh. The third individual who was present and participated in the creation of the heavens and their host is “the breath” of Yahweh’s mouth. Although the writer is stressing who should be credited for the created order, and perhaps repeating in distich fashion what was written in the previous phrase, a few observations are worth noting which show distinction as well as emphasis. First, “breath” (Heb. *ruach*) is not the same thing as a word (*dabar*). Each may occur without the other’s input or presence. Second, although the Hebrew word *ruach* occurs nearly 400 times in the Old Testament, and is translated into over two-dozen different English words, by far the greatest number of instances the word is translated as “spirit” in English. Although most English versions of the Bible translate *ruach* at Psalm 33:6 as “breath,” if one were to translate it as “Spirit,” one would be justified, especially when one takes into account the presence of the Spirit at creation, which is what the context of Psalm 33:6 is about. Moreover, the LXX uses the Greek word *pneuma* for *ruach* in verse six, which is almost unanimously translated as “spirit” in the New Testament. Third, the Spirit proceeds from the LORD, demonstrating its divine essence and origination, and is credited with creating the host of heaven, which would include not only all entities present in the universe, but the angelic realm as well. All things considered, the third individual in Psalm 33:6 is none other than the Holy Spirit of God. He, along with “the word of the LORD,” who is Jesus, and the LORD Himself, who is Yahweh, present the reader with another Old Testament example of the Trinity, as it acts in tandem to bring into existence the created order.

Isaiah 48:16

“Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.”

The context of this particular verse is the restoration of Israel and impending judgment against Babylon (v. 14). The LORD is promising His intervention, but the LORD is not doing the narrating, at least in the sense of the LORD God. Instead, the LORD God is the one who sent not only “Me,” as the one who is making the declarations, but “His Spirit” (Heb. *ruacho*) as well. So, we have the LORD God and His Spirit present, but who is “Me” in this particular verse? There are several clues in the immediate and overall biblical contexts which point to the person of the pre-incarnate Jesus as the person doing the speaking. The first clue is that “Me” possesses

the same glory as that of Yahweh and “will not give [it] to another.” Jesus would pray just prior to his crucifixion, while awaiting his betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, “And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was,” (Jn. 17:5) and “Father, I desire that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou has given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24).

A second clue is found in verse twelve of Isaiah 48, where the “Me” of the passage states, “Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.” He not only calls Israel, but asserts that He created the earth and the heavens, and then takes credit for their ability to remain intact. Later, Jesus would not only be given credit for creating all things (Jn. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:15), but John would point out that Israel belonged to Jesus (Jn. 1:11; 10:16). Moreover, He would make the same claim as the “first and the last” in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 1:17-18 we read, “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.’” Later in Revelation Jesus would claim, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:13).

A final clue is found in verse seventeen when the LORD claims to be the Redeemer of Israel. If ignored one would assume that it was merely Yahweh speaking, but actually the narration is a continuation from the previous verse where “Me” is speaking. Me is not only the LORD, but the Redeemer as well. In fact, He is the “LORD your God.” Earlier in Isaiah, Yahweh is distinguished from the Redeemer, yet both are credited with speaking to Israel concerning the exclusivity of their being as God. In Isaiah 44:6 we read, “Thus says the Lord (*Yahweh*), the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and the last, And there is no God (*Elohim*) besides Me.”

Therefore, based just on these three clues, not only is a plausible case made for the presence of the pre-incarnate Jesus, but given the presence of all three personalities—the Lord God, His Spirit, and “Me”—Isaiah has provided us another OT reference to the Trinity.

Isaiah 63:9-14

“In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the angel of His presence saved them; In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them; And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; Therefore, He turned himself to become their enemy, He fought against them. Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is he who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them, Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, Who led them through the depths? Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not stumble; As the cattle

which go down into valley, The Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So didst Thou lead Thy people, To make for Thyself a glorious name.”

When we turn to Isaiah Chapter 63 we have another instance where Yahweh is addressing the impending judgment upon the nations, as well as his compassion toward Israel. In verses 9-14, though, we see all three characters of the Trinity at work in their ministry of redemption.³³ In verse nine the first character is mentioned as the “angel of His presence.” This would be the person of the pre-incarnate Jesus.³⁴ As will be seen below in the discussion covering the Angel of the Lord, the Angel himself is no mere creature, as other angels are. Instead, the Angel possesses qualities and demonstrates activities that only Yahweh Himself possesses and acts upon. A fuller explanation, therefore, is given below.

The second character is obvious, being mentioned as the LORD in verses seven and fourteen. What makes this particular passage more intriguing, though, is that Isaiah refers to Yahweh as “our Father” in verse sixteen. Rarely does Israel see God as the Father, as He is mentioned as such only two other times in the Old Testament (1 Chr. 29:10; Isa. 64:8). In fact, Isaiah points out that the Father and Redeemer go hand-in-hand as the name of God (Isa. 63:16). Such a designation does not mean, as the Mormons often falsely assume, that God as the Father sexually procreates His offspring with a Heavenly Mother, but that He is a Father in the sense of being the originator or source of all that is, and in this case, is the originator or source of Israel’s existence as a people and as a nation.³⁵

The third character is as obvious, yet distinct, as the God the Father is. He is the Holy Spirit, found in verses 10, 11, and 14. Though some, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, wish to relegate the Holy Spirit to the status of being nothing more than a compelling force that does God’s will, in verse 10 we see that the Holy Spirit is both rebelled against, and is grieved as well, which are hardly qualities of impersonality. Later on in verse 14 the Holy Spirit is credited with granting rest to the nation of Israel upon leaving Egyptian bondage, as well as leading them for the express purpose of glorifying God. Therefore, what we have in Isaiah’s commentary is anything but a reference to an impersonal “active force” that God uses to compel people to act. Instead, we

³³ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Minneapolis: Bethany, [2003]), 2:289. Garrett informs us that “There have been four major theories as to the identity of the Angel of Yahweh”: Logos Theory, Angelic Theory, Interpolation Theory, and Instrumental Theory. The Logos Theory is the conclusion “that the Angel of Yahweh is the preexistent Logos who would later become incarnate in Jesus Christ. Some would even refer to the Angel as ‘the second person of the Trinity.’ This view was popular among the Church Fathers and has had its adherents through the centuries.” James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1990]), 1:360.

³⁴ John F. Walvoord, “Series in Christology—Part 3: The Preincarnate Son of God,” *BibSac* 104:415 (July 1947): 287; Daniel L. Akin, *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 301; Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 2:600.

³⁵ J. Daane, “Father,” Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1982]), 2:286; Helmer Ringgren, “‘ābh,” G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1974]), 1:18.

have a personal being which acts in accord with the divine will of God to guide and direct His people; a person that later in the New Testament is said to be able to search the depths of the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10). And no person, unless He is God himself, is capable of accomplishing such a feat. Besides, in order to search for anything implies personal intelligence.

Therefore, in Isaiah 63 we see all three members of the Godhead working in unison both to judge the nations and redeem the nation of Israel. What it takes, though, is a clear view of scripture untainted by a preconceived theology in order for them to come into view.

The Angel of the Lord

As mentioned previously, there is more to the title “angel of the Lord” than merely an extra-dimensional creature which exists on a slightly higher plane than do most humans, who goes about performing God’s will or simply informing humans of God’s message or intentions. The reason one knows this is because when one observes the details of certain contexts where the angel of the Lord is referred, there are qualities and characteristics attributed to the angel which are consistent only with the Lord himself. In other words, they are qualities and characteristics consistent with deity! The typical term used to describe such a manifestation of God is *theophany*,³⁶ even though as Frame points out, God may not only appear as an angel, but as a man, and “Most often he appears as the Glory-cloud, the fiery cloud that led Israel through the wilderness and settled on the sanctuary.”³⁷ Moreover, given the context, Yahweh—as in God the Father—is not being spoken of directly, but indirectly, meaning that the angel of the Lord is another person which is reflecting that which is essential to Yahweh’s constitution, which is why the angel is speaking or acting in the manner that he is.³⁸ But, to better see just exactly what is meant by the theophany known as the “angel of the Lord,” a few examples are now provided which should remove beyond doubt that when he is being spoken of in the Old Testament, in certain contexts, the writer is speaking of a very unique person associated with God as God.

³⁶ A theophany is a “Manifestation of God that is tangible to the human senses. In its most restrictive sense, it is a visible appearance of God in the Old Testament period often, but not always, in human form. Some would also include in this term Christophanies (preincarnate appearances of Christ) and angelophanies (appearances of angels).” William C. Williams, “Theophany,” *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 770. Although Williams’s definition goes on to preclude an association of the angel of the Lord with Christ due to some tenuous reasoning based on a distinction between angels and the Lord, there is enough scriptural support to conclude that his hesitation is unwarranted, which will be provided in the succeeding commentary.

³⁷ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), 585.

³⁸ Louis Goldberg defined the angel of the Lord as a, “Supernatural being who bears a message on behalf of God. In many passages in the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord is identified with God, while in other instances a distinction is made between the Lord and the angel. In general, however, the

Genesis 16

The first instance where the angel of the Lord appears in the Bible is found in Genesis 16, shortly after Hagar and Abram have conceived the child who would eventually become Ishmael. Hagar has been unceremoniously discharged from Sarai's presence due to jealousy on the part of Sarai, and is in the wilderness night unto a stream when the angel begins to query Hagar. Two statements made by the angel make it clear that he is not a mere creature after the order of other angels. First, he assures Hagar that amid her distress, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count" (v. 10). Only God himself is capable of making such a reassuring statement.

Second, Hagar herself identifies the angel as God in verse 13. She tells Him, "Thou art a God who sees." God in this particular verse is *El*. While *El* may refer in some instances to men (Ps. 82:6, plural form) or pagan deities (Ezek. 28:2), what we have in Genesis 16:13 is one of Yahweh's proper names specifically reserved for Him. When combined with the Hebrew adjective *ro'i*, which is the noun form meaning "see," one has a description of the personal God of Israel that is uncharacteristic of any of the pagan deities, who are incapable of seeing, but hearing or answering as well (cf. 1 Kg. 17). Given that the angel is spoken of in distinction from the LORD God, and yet possesses the attributes mentioned above, including one of His proper names, then it is safe to conclude that his angel is actually a preincarnate visit by Jesus Christ himself. This will come more into view shortly.

Genesis 22

A second reference that is more definitive as to the identity of the angel of the Lord is found in Genesis 22. It is the passage which describes the event where Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac (vv. 1-2). As the story progresses the angel of the Lord intervenes to prohibit Abraham from actually sacrificing his son. In verse 12 one finds an allusion to the angel being God himself. The angel tells Abraham, "...for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." At first glance one might suppose that the angel was merely delivering a message on God's behalf, but such is not the case since in verse 11 it is the angel Himself who is calling Abraham from heaven. The angel is literally speaking for God (*Elohim*, v. 1)!

Later, in verse 16, the angel calls to Abraham a second time and tells him, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD..." In other words, the angel not only takes on the identity of *Elohim*, but now takes on the identity of the LORD (*Yahweh*) himself. This is followed by similar language as that found previously in the angel's assurance to Hagar, when the angel assures Abraham that He will bless and multiply his progeny as the stars of heaven, which, once again, is something that only God can do; the reason being Abraham obeyed the voice of the angel, who

terms 'the angel of the Lord,' 'the Lord,' and 'God' are interchangeable." *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, 23.

can be none other than God Himself (v. 18). Yet, since the distinction is still made by the author, that this is the angel of the Lord, rather than the LORD God Himself, then this theophany is another manifestation of the preincarnate Jesus Christ.

Exodus 3

In a striking third reference, the angel of the Lord appears before Moses on Mount Horeb, where Moses is instructed to go to Pharaoh with a message to let God's people, Israel, go. The angel manifests himself in a burning bush, Moses is intensely inquisitive over the sight, and the angel commands him, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). Prior to the chastisement, the author changes the identity of the one speaking from the burning bush, an angel, to God (*Elohim*) in verse 4. From there the angel, or God, declares to Moses that he is "the God your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses asks for a name to relay to the sons of Israel, to assure them of his message, God tells him, "I AM WHO I AM... I AM has sent me to you" (v. 14), or God's "memorial name to all generations" (v. 15). The angel, in other words, is equated with the self-existent, omnipotent God of all eternity! Yet, as previously witnessed, the angel is distinct from God as a person, meaning that what we have here is the preincarnate Jesus making a declaration to Moses—something that only God Himself could do.

Numbers 22

In Numbers 22 we have another occurrence where the angel of the LORD is described as much more than the typical angel one would imagine when thinking about biblical angels, their words and activities. More specifically, the angel confronts a false prophet and diviner by the name of Balaam. Balaam is employed by a Moabite king by the name of Balak to curse Israel, who he considers to be his mortal enemy. Balak tries three times to get Balaam to curse Israel, yet to no avail. In chapter 22, the angel of the LORD manifests himself before Balaam, yet Balaam is incapable of discerning his presence. The donkey on which Balaam is riding is readily aware of the angel and avoids coming into contact with him. Finally, after Balaam strikes the donkey three times, it questions his actions, and a verbal exchange takes place in what amounts to one of the more comedic scenes in the Bible. A jackass actually has more insight into the things of God than does a man.

Balaam's eyes are eventually opened by the LORD and he sees why the donkey refused to move forward; the angel of the LORD had been blocking their way. The identity that the angel is actually God himself is deduced from several verses. Earlier in Numbers 20:16 the angel is described as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt, while later in Numbers 23:22 and 24:8, during Balaam's explanation to Balak on why he could not curse Israel, it is God (*El*) who is

credited with delivering Israel.³⁹ Then in Numbers 22:35 we observe that it is the words of the angel that Balaam is to speak, while in verse 38 those words are attributed to God (*Elohim*). That mandate would continue in Numbers 23:5, 12, and 16, with acknowledgments that the words Balaam was issuing belonged to the LORD or Yahweh (vv. 23:17; 26; 24:13). Interestingly, in 24:2 the Spirit of God shows up and guides Balaam as well. In essence, what we have in the story of Balaam, as it relates to the Trinity, are all three characters in the Godhead, as they lead and guide the prophet Balaam to bless Israel three times amid her enemies, rather than to curse Israel.

Judges 6

The setting in Judges 6 is the oppressive reign of the Midianites over Israel. Conditions in Israel had declined due to Israel's choice to do "what was evil in the sight of the LORD." The Israelites complained, and the LORD responded; it is a common pattern found in Israel's history. The exception is that at this particular time the angel of the LORD shows up and appoints Gideon as the one who will deliver Israel. The angel of the LORD, as was seen elsewhere, has a double identity. In verses 11 and 12 he is merely called the "angel of the LORD," but that changes as the storyline progresses. After Gideon questions the angel concerning the LORD's presence amid the distress, in verse 14 the angel's identity changes to the LORD himself. Instead of the angel looking at Gideon the text reads, "And the LORD looked at him and said." In return Gideon addresses the angel as the LORD in verse 15, and then in verse 16 the angel confesses that he is the LORD.

Gideon then requests that the angel not depart, as he goes to prepare an offering to him. The angel of the Lord agrees to remain, Gideon prepares the offering, and then upon returning "the angel of God" (v. 20) instructs Gideon on what to do with the offering: "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." When Gideon does so, the angel takes his staff and sets the offering on fire, and then immediately vanishes from Gideon's presence. Gideon then offers an interesting prayer to the Lord God (*Adonai Yahweh*), which is a similar expression found in Genesis 33:20 when Jacob had wrestled with a man, who turned out to be God (*Elohim*), and has his named changed from Jacob to Israel. The Lord's response is reassuring to Gideon, since he had seen this angel "face to face," and he will not die. What makes the Lord's statement significant is that only if the angel was also God—a theophany, in other words—would it make sense. For a man to see an angel did not bring an automatic death sentence; seeing God did (Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16). Therefore, what we have, once again, is a manifestation of the preincarnate Jesus Christ in the form of the angel of God, as God himself, who instructs his servant Gideon on how to set the people free.

³⁹ See also Judges 2:1—"Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you...'"

Judges 13

Judges 13 is the account leading up to the birth of Samson, a judge whose appointment eventually ends in heartbreak. Once again Israel has sinned against God and the Philistines subject her to 40 years of oppression. Toward the end the angel of the LORD—who is also identified as the angel of God, the man of God, and finally God himself—appears to a woman married to a man named Manoah, who was of the Danite tribe. The angel promises that despite her barrenness that she would conceive a son, who would eventually become Israel’s deliverer. It would be Samson, a Nazarite.⁴⁰ After making a second visit to appease Manoah’s inquisitiveness, a question is asked of the angel’s name, which is the first clue to demonstrate that this “man of God” was no mere angel. The answer the angel gives is instructive, given that he replies that his name is “wonderful” (Heb. *pili*) (v. 18) and that “He performed wonders (Heb. *pala*) while Manoah and his wife looked on” (v. 19).

Later, Isaiah the prophet would predict the coming of a child deliverer, who has been identified as Jesus, that would also have the name of “Wonderful” (Heb. *pele*) as well. The deity of the angel, though, is sealed by both Manoah and his wife’s testimony when they assert, “We shall surely die, for *we have seen God*” (13:22). Once again, to see God brought the death penalty (Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16), yet it is God who Manoah and his wife had seen, via a theophany, and would live to tell about it. The theophany, who appeared as a brilliantly illumined man (v. 6), as well as an angel of God, could be none other than the preincarnate Jesus Christ. Interestingly, Chapter 13 closes with the notice of the Spirit of the LORD’s arrival to lead and guide Samson, meaning that one not only has the angel of the LORD (who is Jesus) and the LORD God himself present, but the Spirit as well. Hence, we have all three characters of the Trinity present at the birth and direction of the life of Samson.

Zechariah 3

In a post-exilic passage, Zechariah provides a scene where Joshua the high priest and Satan are standing before the angel of the LORD in a scene reminiscent of the Judgment Seat. Satan is accusing Joshua as the LORD announces that Judah will be His portion and Jerusalem His city, both of which are references to a future event when the LORD restores them both at the end of the age. As part of the imagery Joshua is pictured in filthy garments, which is representative of a backslidden nation. Amid the accusations of Satan the LORD rebukes him and then the angel orders that the filthy garments which Joshua is wearing be replaced with clean, festal robes,

⁴⁰ “The term comes from the verb *nāzar*, to ‘separate,’ and denotes in general one who is separated from certain things and unto others, and so distinguished from other persons and consecrated unto God (cf. Gen. 49:26; Deut. 33:16). According to others, the word *nēzer*, ‘diadem,’ contains the original idea of *nāzar*, which will then radically signify ‘to crown,’ and the hair is regarded as a crown to the person. In accordance with this view the Nazarite is a ‘crowned one,’ because ‘his separation to God is on his head’ (Num. 6:7), evidently in allusion to the mass of uncut hair, which was considered an ornament (6:5; cf. 2 Sam. 14:25-26).” Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 907.

which is indicative of Israel's redemption. When the servants standing by place the garments on Joshua, it is symbolic of having his iniquity taken away, not just by the LORD, but by the angel of the LORD himself (v. 4)! The point here is that only God almighty can remove iniquity and sin, yet it is the angel of the LORD who is taking credit for what only God can do. Later on Jesus would forgive the sin of a paralytic, while some scribes and Pharisees accused him of blasphemy and ask "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Mk. 2:7; Lk. 5:21). Clearly, only God can forgive sin, whether in the case of restoring Israel or of the lame. And since that is the case, then the angel of the LORD and Jesus are deity, speaking not only God's words, but performing God's deeds as well.

The preceding are only a few samples of the Trinity found in the Old Testament. Since Jesus was unknown to the Jews during that time, and the Holy Spirit was not necessarily seen as God by the Jews in the same sense that later Christianity would view him, then the OT does not explicitly announce the triune nature of God. It is strongly implied, though, as pointed out above. What the reader of the OT must do is observe what the whole of the Bible has to say about the subject, and especially when searching the OT for evidence of the doctrine. It is when we turn to the New Testament, though, that the Trinitarian nature of God becomes even more evident. For not only is God the Father seen as God, but the explicit declaration that both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are God, coupled with consistent allusions to all three characters as they appear in tandem with one another in different settings makes it quite obvious to the astute observer that God exists in Trinity, but that God wants man to know that through the writings of every NT writers except one, James. It is with that in mind that we now turn to those NT writers to see what God inspired them to write about Himself and His Triune existence.

The Trinity in the New Testament

The New Testament is literally loaded with references pointing to the reality of the Trinity. That said it will not be the object of this survey to look at each and every reference, since to be exhaustive is not necessary to prove its existence. Therefore, rather than look at each and every reference, a sampling from each of the NT writers, with the exception of James, will be offered.⁴¹ It is acknowledged some of the writers of certain Gospels and letters may not have actually been those persons,⁴² but that does that change the fact that the NT consistently teaches a Trinitarian view of God.

If one is still under the impression that the Trinity in the Godhead is an absurdity, especially after honestly reading and contemplating what the biblical writers have to say about it, then as is the case so often, evidence is not the issue: a presuppositional notion rooted in prejudicial bias is the

⁴¹ James, the half-brother of Jesus, is the only NT writer who said nothing about the Trinity.

⁴² This is an issue with those of who engage in what is known as Higher Criticism, but it will not be dealt with here, given that Higher Criticism is not germane to whether or not the NT teaches the Trinity.

issue, and until that is recognized and rectified, then that person will never see the evidence, regardless of how exhaustive the list might be. That said, we now turn to the first of eight NT passages which deals with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit as they harmoniously relate in Triunity.

Matthew 28:19-20

Just prior to Jesus' ascension into heaven he left his disciples instructions on what they were to do to carry on his ministry of hope and reconciliation to a lost world. He told them, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Several observations are worth noting in his final statement, particularly as they relate to the Trinity.

First, after gathering and discipling converts to Christianity, the novice was to be baptized "into the name" of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "Into" (Gr. εἰς), according to Carson, "strongly suggests a coming-into-relationship-with or a coming-under-the-Lordship-of" God.⁴³ The name (Gr. *to onoma*) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is both definitive and singular, which is interesting given that God has several names, including His personal name, Yahweh. Moreover, given that a name had more importance or significance in Bible times than today—since a person's name intimately identified him with the subject of his name⁴⁴—for Jesus to command his disciples to baptize in the name which linked the Father, Son, and Spirit together is highly significant in itself. It essentially associated God the Father with Jesus and the Holy Spirit as deity. Matthew, though, does not offer any indication which name he had in mind, but merely attributes the name to all three characters which comprise the Trinity when baptism takes place. Elsewhere new disciples were to be baptized in the name of Jesus—whose name means "Yeshua saves"—while God the Father and the Holy Spirit are mentioned (cf. Acts 2:38-39; 8:14-16; 1 Pet. 3:18, 21), which is consistent with Jesus' command in Matthew's Gospel.

Second, Jesus instructs the disciples that when they disciple others and baptize them, they are to also teach them to obey the same commandments that Jesus taught them to obey. This kind of instruction goes back to Old Testament times when Yahweh informed Moses to remind Israel prior to entering the Promised Land: "You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments" (Deut. 11:1 cf. 11:13; 30:16; Josh. 22:5). The exception is that Jesus is now equating what he has commanded with that which Yahweh had commanded. In fact, Jesus would make it a condition to determine whether his disciples actually loved him or not: "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15; 15:10). Of course, just because his disciples obeyed Jesus by

⁴³ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gæbelein, ed., 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8: 597.

⁴⁴ Douglas Stuart, "Names, Proper," Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1986]), 3:483-88.

making disciples, baptizing them, and then teaching them to obey the things that Jesus taught, does not mean that his disciples were also deity. It merely meant that according to their confession, which was wrought in regenerative faith, they would do that which was commensurate with that confession.

Third, Jesus emphatically (Gr. *ego...eimi*) spoke of his omnipresence, which is something that only God possesses, by claiming that he would be with his disciples, “even to the end of the age.” Since Jesus upon his ascension went into heaven with a physical body, and given the context of the relationship he intimately shares with the Father and the Spirit, then his presence would not be via a physical presence, but a spiritual one. This is not to confuse the Father or Spirit with Jesus personally, but essentially where the Father and the Spirit are, so is Jesus! Elsewhere Jesus would speak of a “Helper” (Gr. *paracletos*) who would come in his absence, not only teaching the disciples all things, but bringing to remembrance the things that Jesus taught (Jn. 14:16, 26).⁴⁵ The Helper, who is identified by Jesus as the Holy Spirit, would live within the persons of those whom God the Father would draw and redeem. The physical bodies of those whom the Spirit would take up residence would be called temples (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19), where the Spirit would remain forever (Jn. 14:16). Therefore, those whom the Spirit resides also have within them the presence of Jesus as well. It is the ultimate indicator that a person belongs to God in the first place (Rom. 8:9).

Often Matthew 28:19-20 is looked at purely for missionary reasons. Jesus said “Go!” and the well-intentioned head off to fulfill what they believe God would have them to do. Unfortunately, such myopathy overlooks a theological statement which shows that it is not just Jesus commanding believers to “Go!” It is the Godhead, consisting of the Father, Son, and Spirit commanding believers to “Go!” Failure to recognize this is to undermine the mission before it ever gets started. For all three characters in the Godhead are integral in the salvation of anyone, much less the discipleship of the same. Hence, Jesus’ command to make disciples, baptize them, and then teach them in the name, *not names*, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is theologically and evangelistically significant.

Mark 1:9-11

The subject of Jesus’ baptism is included in Matthew and Luke’s Gospel, as well as here in Mark 1:9-11. John indirectly alludes to it, but does so more to point out the sonship of Jesus than describe the event itself. In each instance we have what is essentially the *official* start of Jesus’

⁴⁵ Muslims erroneously assume that when Jesus spoke of the Helper, that he was predicting the coming of Muhammad. Yet, the context is quite clear that Muhammad is nowhere in sight, but rather the Holy Spirit. For Jesus says, “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that he may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides in you, and will be in you” (Jn. 14:16-17). Then in verse 26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

three-year ministry, as they fulfill Old Testament prophecy and the Law by culminating in his immersion in the Jordan River as conducted by John the Baptist. What makes the event relevant to the study of the Trinity is that not only are Jesus and John present, but so is God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The story actually begins in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, Chapter 40, with a prediction that one day Israel's oppression will end. Yahweh Elohim (LORD God) will intercede in her behalf announcing that "her warfare has ended, that her iniquity (or penalty) has been removed," and that she will be restored as a nation. A prelude to the fulfillment of the prophecy is that "A voice" will come calling to "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God" (40:3). It is these words that are later recorded by both Matthew and Mark to refer to John the Baptist and his ministry to introduce Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). In Mark's account John is seen as the "voice" and Jesus is the LORD. Moreover, in Luke's account, Jesus is also viewed as God (3:6) or the Elohim of Isaiah 40:3.⁴⁶ John's mission is to introduce God's ministry of reconciliation, as seen in the person of Jesus, as he calls the nation of Israel to "clear the way for the LORD." Jesus is Yahweh Elohim, in other words, and John is fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy by going before him.

When Jesus arrives at the River Jordan to be baptized, Mark does not relay the detail of the discussion that took place between John and Jesus that Matthew does, for John actually tries to dissuade Jesus from being baptized. But, after some persuasion on the part of Jesus that his baptism would "fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15), John proceeded.⁴⁷ When Jesus came up out of the water it also marked the time when the two other persons in the Trinity manifest themselves. The Holy Spirit descended upon him out of heaven, as a dove, and God the Father declared, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased" (v. 11). Immediately after the baptism, Jesus is compelled by the same Spirit to leave for the wilderness where he would be tempted for 40 days by Satan.

⁴⁶ In Isaiah 40:10, "Lord God" is actually Yahweh Adonai (אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה), meaning that Jesus is also the Lord Adonai as well.

⁴⁷ Although some, such as the Mormons, are confused over why Jesus needed to be baptized, by assuming that he needed to in order to prove his obedience to God or to serve as an example of how to be saved via commandment keeping (2 Nephi 31:4-11), Pentecost's position is much more biblical and tenable when he argued, "If Jesus was the Messiah, then John who was anticipating the Messiah's coming was obligated to submit to His authority. It was this submission in recognition of His person that Jesus demanded of John. In obedience to the entreaty of Jesus, John baptized Him." J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 93. Shepard concurs that after John recognized and confessed Jesus for who he was, he subordinated himself to Jesus' authority and proceeded to fulfill Jesus' request. Not only was Jesus fulfilling his calling, as looking forward to his death and resurrection—the latter of which is symbolized in the baptismal rite—"In the act of baptism He would receive the seal of the Heavenly Father on His mission and the gift of the Holy Spirit qualifying Him for it...It was the initiatory rite for the New Covenant of the kingdom. The baptism of John 'was from heaven,' and Jesus' motive in it was to fulfill all righteousness in the perfect accomplishment of the will of God." J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 71.

Mark's passage clearly demonstrates not only the deity of Jesus, but the intimate relationship of the persons in the Trinity. Jesus fulfills God the Father's will by being baptized, the Holy Spirit acts in a comforting way by attending to Jesus, and God the Father approves of Jesus' act of obedience. For those at odds with the Trinitarian doctrine they must find some compelling explanation why Mark's passage (as well as Matthew and Luke, and even indirectly John) does not demonstrate its reality. Abject denials and incoherent misrepresentations are not compelling, given the clarity of what Mark reports concerning Jesus at his baptism.

Acts 20:22-24

Luke, who is the author of not only the Gospel attributed to him, but the Book of Acts as well, is not immune to expressing his thoughts about the Trinitarian nature of God. Starting in Chapter 1 of his Gospel he speaks of the Holy Spirit's coming upon Mary, while God the Father overshadows her to miraculously conceive the Son of God (1:35). After Jesus is born, a man named Simeon has revealed to him the Lord's Christ by the Holy Spirit (2:25). Of course, as previously mentioned in the discussion from Mark, Luke relays the baptismal experience of Jesus by John the Baptist (3:21-22), and then also shares the temptation of Jesus, as the Son of God, by the devil in the wilderness, after being led there by the Holy Spirit (4:1-3). During Jesus' ministry, he instructs his disciples to not be misguided in their zeal because the demons obeyed them, and then rejoices in the Holy Spirit as he praises God the Father for revealing what He has to his disciples (10:21). So, Luke is well aware and quite open when it comes to reveal the Trinity in his Gospel. But the passage we really want to look at is found in the extension of the Book of Luke, and that is the Book of Acts.

Although there are several references to the Trinity in the Acts of the Apostles,⁴⁸ Acts 20:22-24 is particularly interesting, given that the passage demonstrates the individual, yet harmonious activities and ministries of each of the characters in the Godhead to assist in the ministry of redemption by the Apostle Paul. Often Paul is criticized for being a renegade and starting his own brand of Christianity that was completely contrary from the kind that Jesus revealed while walking the earth. From the Luke's account, though, such was not the case at all.

In the Acts 20:22-24 passage, the apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, completing his third missionary journey. He manages to stop in the port city on Miletus where he shares with them his experiences and prayers, and then speaks of how his ministry unfolded, as he attempts to make to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. First he tells them that he is unsure of what awaits him in Jerusalem, given the persecution of the Jews, "except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me" (v. 23). For those who only think that the Holy Spirit is some kind of impersonal "active force," they must also explain how such a force can "solemnly testify" to anything, much less predict the future, if it is not actually a he. Nevertheless, Paul continues by discounting the value of his life in comparison to the ministry

⁴⁸ Acts 3:32-33; 38-39; 4:8-10; 24-31; 7:55-56; 10:38, 45-48; 11:15-17; 15:8-11.

that the Lord Jesus had given him. Prior to Paul's redemption, he was a proud Pharisee, thinking that he knew God and His purposes. Afterward, though, he found that his life and the things in it were but "dung" (KJV) in contrast to "the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). Because his eyes were now opened to the truth, which is only found in the person of Jesus, he also realized that his whole ministry and life's purpose was to "testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God" (v. 24). Therefore, in two short verses we not only have two great figures of the Bible living out their Christian lives by writing and proclaiming what God has done to make them so, part of their authorship and proclamation involved recognizing just who was instrumental in make their lives what they were: the Holy Spirit testifies, Jesus grants, and God the Father graces (un-meritoriously favors): the Trinity at work.

John 14:26

Although John's Gospel frequently speaks of the deity of Jesus, he also addresses the Trinitarian nature of God as well. John 14:26 is a classic example. Jesus, just prior to his crucifixion, is addressing his disciples concerning his impending departure, but his message includes that of comfort. He is going away, but he will not leave his own with another Helper or Comforter as some translators translate the Greek word *paracletos*. The Holy Spirit will take Jesus' place and abide with them forever. In fact, as one reads through the whole chapter leading up to verse 26, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are intimately associated together as being *in* each other. They abide together and then abide with the believer (vv. 11, 17, 20, 23). Moreover, both the Father and Jesus are credited with sending the Holy Spirit to abide with the believer (vv. 16, 26).

What makes verse 26 significant is that the Helper, or Holy Spirit, has the role of not only abiding with the believer, but he ministers to the believer by calling to remembrance the things that Jesus taught. He is not in the business of teaching something wholly contrary or innovative that might contradict Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus admits what he taught did not originate with himself, but were the very words of the Father. "He who does not love Me does not keep My words," Jesus argues, "and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (v. 24). In essence, therefore, when the Holy Spirit reminds the believer of the words of Jesus, he is in actuality reminding him of the words of God. And since Jesus words have only been recorded in the Bible, then everytime a person picks it up and reads it with the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, then one gleans not only the mind of God, but perhaps after reading this article will understand the triune effort undertaken by God to reveal the Bible to the reader in the first place.

That each of the Gospel writers believed in the Trinity is without doubt. They may not have necessarily used specific terms like "Trinity" to promote their belief, but they certainly and repeatedly referred to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as each sharing specific roles in not only the redemption of man, but of the glorification of God. But, what do the rest of the biblical writers like Paul, Peter, the writer to the Hebrews and Jude have to say about the Trinity? Were

they as convinced of its existence or did they believe in something wholly other, leaving the Gospel writers to be nothing more than anomalies?

2 Corinthians 13:14

The apostle Paul was the second most prolific writer of biblical material behind Luke, even though Paul wrote more letters—either 13, or perhaps 14, if one includes Hebrews in his corpus. Second Corinthians is most likely the fourth letter he had written to the Corinthian church, with two letters no longer extant. That stated, Paul was as much a Trinitarian, if not more so, than any biblical writer. Aside from 2 Corinthians 13:14, Paul addresses the Trinity at least two-dozen times in his letters, and those apart from the numerous rebuttals dealing with attacks upon Jesus' deity. Second Corinthians 13:14 is about as straightforward and precise a statement dealing with the Trinitarian formula as one will find in the Bible, and only those with an anti-Trinitarian prejudicial bias would deny it.

The Second Corinthian letter deals with Christian leadership, and more specifically Paul's apostleship, as those who had come to be known as the "Super Apostles" were constantly assailing Paul's standing as an apostle. Unfortunately, the Corinthian Church had fallen prey to the conniving of those "false apostles," and "deceitful workers," who disguise "themselves as the apostles of Christ," (11:13), which is why Paul, in part, chose to write this fourth letter to warn the Corinthians of their wiliness. Given the demonic demeanor of those beguiling the Church, while defaming Paul in the process, one would not be surprised if they were not forerunners of anti-Trinitarianism in their day.

After giving the Corinthian church ample instruction concerning not only the false "apostles," a defense of his apostleship, and sound instruction regarding leaders and leadership qualities, in Chapter 13 he closes with a Trinitarian benediction. He writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." The grace of Jesus is a common expression of Paul's. He uses it no less than ten times in his letters.⁴⁹ Frequently he combines the theme of Jesus' grace with that of the Father's. Earlier in the Second Corinthian letter he wrote, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (8:9). And yet it is only befitting that Paul would allude to the grace of Jesus, especially in tandem with the Father, given that they are one, not just in plan, purpose, and essence, but in their demeanor toward man. God must be gracious in order to redeem man, for man can do nothing to redeem himself. That grace must translate into the act of Jesus, otherwise redemption could never have taken place on the cross. Therefore, it is no surprise that Paul would allude to the grace of Jesus in this benediction, for as John the Beloved wrote elsewhere, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17).

⁴⁹ Rom. 5:17, 21; 16:24; 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; Phm. 25.

Then Paul addresses the love of God. Love and God go hand-in-hand, for God is love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). In fact, the believer loves God because God first loved the believer (1 Jn. 4:19). It was the love of God that compelled Him to give His only begotten Son, as a sacrifice, to propitiate God's wrath that He would have imposed upon man for his sin and rebellion had the Son not done so (Jn. 3:16). Moreover, God's love is what takes the sting out of our trials and tribulations, though it does not immediately remove them completely (Rom. 5:3-5). And because we can see those trials for what they are, we are comforted by the fact that regardless of the trouble that might beset us, whether precipitated by our own waywardness, or by something external, we may be assured that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:39). Interestingly enough, that love is also found in the person of Jesus (cf. 2 Tim. 1:13). Ultimately, it is God's love that abides within the believer that proves that he is what he claims to be, as he loves those whom God has also redeemed (1 Jn. 3:10, 17, 23; 4:20-21).

Finally, Paul speaks of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Just the expression itself is enough to refute any idea that the Holy Spirit is some kind of impersonal force, for one has to wonder how many times those who reject the personality of the Holy Spirit, and yet concede his existence, have ever shared a similar time of fellowship with other "active forces," like say, a high voltage line, an x-ray machine, or a car battery. It is certainly possible that they might, as odd as it might seem—and that "active force" would certainly compel them to act should they become involved in a time of too close a fellowship—but that hardly seems to be what Paul has in mind here. The reason why Paul encourages the Corinthians to have fellowship with the Holy Spirit is because he is as much God as is both the Father and Jesus. In fact, Paul would address the concept of fellowshiping with Jesus as a product of God's faithfulness, and as a blessing due to the shed blood of Christ, in the first letter he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16). When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians he would again mention the fellowship of the Spirit (Phil. 2:1), meaning that it was something that Paul repeatedly endorsed for all Christians, and not just for a select church on a particular occasion. Clearly, only a person can have fellowship, and that fellowship, if it is to be personally meaningful, must take place with another person. And when speaking about fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Paul is talking about something very special, given the deity of the Spirit and his triune relationship with both the Father and the Son. To have fellowship with the Holy Spirit is to have fellowship with all three.

Therefore, when Paul wrote his benediction he was not merely trying to find an innocuous way to conclude his letter. He concluded it in the manner that he did to deliver maximum impact upon them. Jesus was not just another man, as the "Super Apostles" probably thought that he was. God's love was not just something to speak of in a trite manner when everyone was feeling religious. And the Holy Spirit was not some cosmic whatever from wherever that no one could relate to. No, it was the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and fellowship of the Spirit that helped to make them special in their roles in the Godhead, as they sought to not only redeem man, but to intimately relate to mankind as well.

Hebrews 6:1-4

It is not known with absolute certainty who wrote the Book of Hebrews. The majority of those who have weighed in on the subject think that it was another of the Apostle Paul's writings. There is enough difference in style, though, to keep others from concurring with the majority view. Since there are no trademark examples that Paul wrote it, such as we see in other of his letters where he openly admits his authorship, or at least to using an amanuensis, then the rational position is simply to plead ignorance and admire its content and beauty as a writing from anonymity.⁵⁰ If Paul did not write it, though, then someone as brilliant as Paul existed alongside him and has provided yet another testament to the Trinitarian doctrine, given that the Hebrews author, like Paul, addresses the topic numerous times.⁵¹

In the passage selected for this apologetic response to anti-Trinitarian criticism, the writer is chastising the Hebrew believers for their lack of spiritual maturity. Instead of progressing on in their Christian walk, they had become “dull of hearing” (5:11) and chose to cling to the “elementary principles of the oracles of God” and had come to rely solely upon the “milk and not solid food” (5:12) that was necessary to grow up, so to speak. Such immaturity had stunted their growth to the point of not allowing their senses to be “trained to discern good and evil” (5:13). Whereas they should have been teachers, they were still babies. In essence what the writer is describing is the current condition in many Evangelical Christian churches today, where many of its members have been believers for years, yet have remained in a state of infancy.

The Hebrews writer, therefore, attempts to encourage the believers to “press on,” or grow up, in other words, and cease with the repetitious referrals about the teaching about Christ and repentance from dead works and faith toward God, about ritualistic cleansing and laying on of hands, and the resurrection and eternal judgment. It is not that the writer had become a heretic or that he no longer finds those doctrines integral to the Christian faith; it is that without maturation toward those subjects, the believer will not expand in his knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. Instead, he will grow dull from the repetitiveness, neither fully comprehending the infinite God he alleges to follow, much less the world around him that is in abject rebellion against God, as the latter consistently expands upon its sometimes sophisticated excuses for rejecting God.

Therefore, according to Hebrews 6:1-4, let the believer mature by recognizing that he has been a “partaker of the Holy Spirit” (v. 4), and has “tasted the good word of God” (v. 5), knowing that

⁵⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson writes, “A search for the author of Hebrews is no less frustrating than the search for his audience. Attribution to Paul is reflected in canonical lists and manuscripts (such as P46 where it appears after Romans) but was vigorously questioned by early writers like Tertullian, who thought the Timothy connection made Barnabas a likely candidate, and Origen, who suggested Luke might have translated Paul's thought, but then confessed that ‘only God knows (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* III.38.2)” Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 415.

⁵¹ Heb. 3:4-7; 6:1-4; 9:14; 10:10-15, 29-31.

should he fall away, due to his immaturity, then it will be impossible to again “crucify to themselves the Son of God” (v. 6). It is not that the believer will lose his salvation, for that is impossible for those who are “in Christ.” Instead, the believer will simply fall away or apostatize (Gr. παραπίπτω) and bring “open shame” to Him who purchased his redemption, which is simply another indication of spiritual immaturity. The passage itself is loaded with theological insight as the writer of Hebrews weaves both the practical aspects of Christian growth with the spiritual reality involving all three persons who comprise the Trinity.

1 Peter 1:2

The Apostle Peter continues the Trinitarian tradition by opening his first letter to those Jewish Christians who had been dispersed throughout the Mediterranean area with a declaration similar to those seen previously. It would be the first of four declarations involving the Trinity found in Peter’s two letters, three of which are found in First Peter (1 Pet. 1:2; 12-17; 4:14-16) and one in Second Peter (2 Pet. 1:17-21). What is equally significant in the current passage is Peter’s observation involving the sovereignty of God in matters of salvation of the believer. For not only is God strictly credited with the salvation and preservation of the redeemed, His credit is viewed in the context of all three characters in the Godhead as each member plays a vital role in that redemption.

Peter begins by addressing the “aliens” or literally those Christians whose actual residence is in heaven, as they pass through this earthly existence. Later Peter would refer to them again as “aliens and strangers” (1 Pet. 2:11) in order to encourage them to refrain from engaging in deleterious and unbecoming behavior that was once their livelihood, so that when the unbelieving Gentiles or pagans “slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (2:12) or the Day of Judgment. These aliens are “chosen” (Gr. *eklektois*), from which we get the English word *eclectic*, which simply means choice, election, or selection. They are chosen not based on anything they have done or according to their election of God, but according to God the Father’s foreknowledge (Gr. *prognosis*). Some might falsely assume that God’s foreknowledge is contingent upon the decision-making of the subjects God eventually chooses to elect, but such is not the case. Foreknowledge merely means that long before anyone acknowledged God’s gracious choice of redemption, He had already foreordained it in eternity past. Peter, in other words, is reaffirming what Paul had taught to the Ephesians when he wrote of the predestination of God to choose those believers to adoption (Eph. 1:5). While some cringe at the thought of yielding to God absolute control over all decisions, including salvation, and often throw around charges of blasphemy, heresy, diabolism, or whatever vitriolic epithet that seems appropriate to them at any given moment to either slander or libel those subscribing to God’s sovereignty, what remains clear is that Peter, Paul, *et al*, taught that salvation is preordained or predestined according to the foreknowledge of God.

Peter then turns to the ministry of the Holy Spirit as he sets the chosen apart for redemption. He calls this act the “sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.” A more proper translation might be “by sanctification of the Spirit,” since the word for sanctify is actually a noun and not a participle. Elsewhere the Apostle Paul, once again, addressed this same topic when he wrote the Thessalonian church (2 Thess. 2:13). What Peter is saying is that commensurate with God’s choice to redeem is the Holy Spirit’s work to set apart the sinner for redemption. It is not something the sinner could do for himself if he would, nor would do for himself if he could. Election unto salvation is purely an act of God’s grace, unbeknownst to the individual who is saved. Jesus would call it being “born again,” whereby the redeemed are born from above into the kingdom of God by an act of the Spirit, which Jesus compares to a blowing of the wind (Jn. 3:8). Since one does not know where the wind originates, or where it terminates, then one cannot know precisely how, when, or upon whom the Spirit will move to sanctify unto salvation. All one can do is observe the results and “always give thanks to God” for his gracious provision.

Finally, Peter observes what ought to be the results of God’s preordained choice and the Spirit’s sanctifying work, and that is that the believer would “obey Jesus Christ” because he has been cleansed by His atoning blood. Peter would stress elsewhere the obedience of God’s children, that they would “not be conformed to the former lusts in your ignorance,” but that they would be “like the Holy One who called you” (1:14). Is Peter confused as to whom one is to obey? Hardly; since later he would write, “Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of *our God and Savior, Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet. 1:1). Peter believed that Jesus was God, therefore to obey Jesus was to also obey God the Father; even though he would not confuse the two as those who subscribe to a Modalistic view of God would.⁵² Peter saw Jesus as God, God the Father as God, and the Holy Spirit as God, each of which possessed distinct personalities and ministries, as they fulfilled their roles to glorify God and to redeem mankind, not according to man’s choice, but according His.

Jude 20-21

Our last New Testament author to allude to the Trinity in his writings is Jude. His letter, which is addressed to Christians, is a stark reminder of the amount of deception that is so pervasive in the world that often creeps into the church without notice. False doctrine and those who propagate it regularly come packaged with all the right sounding words and intentions, but

⁵² Modalism, also known as Dynamic or Modalistic Monarchianism, basically taught that Jesus was either consubstantial with the Father, but did not exist as a distinct person within the Godhead, or that God manifested Himself in different modes of personal recognition when need arise. In the former form, Jesus’ deity is denied; in the latter (which is also known as *Sabellianism*), Jesus’ deity is affirmed, but only when his mode of existence was manifest. Both heretical views attempted to maintain the unity of God, as well as an appearance of the Trinity, while denying that all three persons in the Godhead existed simultaneously, as God. Contemporary Modalism is typical found in Unitarian and Oneness Pentecostal-

ultimately does nothing but cause confusion, strife, and division within the body of Christ. And if the confusion, strife, and division does not finally destroy a local church setting, it will neutralize it by causing the members to concede or compromise with error, leading to further demoralization, apathy, and finally a loss of hope and vision. Soon, then, a nihilistic attitude sets in and the once vibrant body is rendered lifeless and ineffective, as it turns into more of a social country club than an actual local church body. It is this kind of error that Jude was writing about and combat as he appealed to believers to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3).

Jude’s allusion to the Trinity is found toward the end of his letter. After warning the reader that some of the conditions which would be characteristic of the last days would include mockery, ungodliness, divisiveness, self-centeredness, and a lack of true spirituality, he encourages the reader to build themselves up in the faith. How is this to be done? First of all by praying in the Holy Spirit. Prayer and the Holy Spirit go together, but praying *in* the Holy Spirit is the key. For it involves an intimacy with the Spirit of God which gives the prayer itself depth; depth of recognition in the Christian walk that is deficient, that only God can remedy; depth of the knowledge of God that only the Spirit can reveal; depth of satisfaction that what Jesus wrought on the cross was sufficient to reconcile the sinner unto God, so that the Spirit could, over the course of a lifetime, gradually sanctify the saint. Moreover, prayer and the Holy Spirit go together since it is the Spirit who not only helps our weakness and intercedes in our behalf when we do not know how or what to pray (Rom. 8:26). Also it is the Spirit who knows the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:11). Therefore, to be in tune with the Spirit of God in prayer is to also be in tune with God Himself, with the positive prospect of being built up in the faith and to recognize and resist those whose sole intent is to undermine it through covert means (Jude 4).

Second, Jude’s audience is to be built up in the faith by keeping themselves in the love of God. As noted previously, love is not only characteristic of God’s person, but is to be characteristic of God’s people. They are to love another. Jesus stated, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13:34 cf. 15:12, 17). Paul would write, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). Peter would stress, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet. 1:22-23). Although God’s love is infinite, that does not preclude the believer from at least trying to imitate God’s love by forbearing and caring for others like He has done so for the believer. Too often, though, we substitute a sort of sappy sentimentality for love and end up destroying our faith in God. Prejudice and cliquishness become a part of our “love” for our neighbors, including those in the church, as we selectively place ourselves on pedestals of what we think are God’s preferences,

type churches, the most famous of the latter would be the “Bishop” T. D. Jakes of the Potter’s House in Dallas and Pastor John Hagee of the Cornerstone Church in San Antonio.

and we end up in a state of delusion. This ought not to be if one is following the biblical prescription to love one's neighbor and to be built up in the faith, as Jude prescribes, by keeping oneself in the love of God.

Finally, Jude asserts that a third way the believers are to be built up in the faith is to wait anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks prodigiously about the subject of waiting, whether it is the creation waiting on the Lord for its redemption (Rom. 8:19), the soul waiting upon God (Ps. 62:5), or the believer waiting for the mercy of Jesus. One reason, perhaps, why waiting is such an issue in the Bible is that mankind is often in such a hurry to have things done its way, according to its time schedule, that it forgets that it is not in control of what is going on in the world; God is. All things will work out just as God has planned it, in almost infinite detail. This would be another example of God's omnipotent control over His creation, with the exception that the believer is encouraged to wait for Jesus' mercy, for his mercy leads to eternal life. Sometimes humans, including believers, believe that God is at their mercy, rather than the other way around. Jude assures his readers, though, that it is humans who are at the mercy of Jesus, who is God. Hence, they need to wait for him, rather than the other way around.

The preceding has been a brief overview of references that demonstrate the reality of the Trinity as taught in the New Testament. For those with eyes to see and ears to hear they are irrefutable. Each of the NT writers taught the Trinity, probably even amid mockers and scoffers who had rejected the Trinitarian aspect of God as well. They are references which would ultimately lead to one of the more controversial creedal statements in Church History, namely the Nicene Creed. An excursus is provided here to examine the statement and determine if it has any Scriptural merit. Often contemporary critics of the Creed disparage it without ever actually having read it. If the Nicene Creed, though, has Scriptural support, then it should be embraced, regardless of anti-Trinitarian critical objections. On the other hand, if the Creed has no biblical support, then it should be rejected as an authoritative statement of Christian belief concerning the person of God. It is with this in mind that we now turn our attention.

Excurses on the Nicene Creed

Early in the Fourth century A.D. a bishop by the name of Arius argued that Jesus Christ was not God incarnate. Instead, Jesus was God the Father's highest creation, who in turned assisted the Father in creating all other things in existence. Arius' motivation was not necessarily an attempt to undermine orthodoxy, but to preserve the unity of God. He believed in a strict monotheism and thought that by introducing characters believed to be outside the monotheistic worldview was to corrupt the doctrine. An argument ensued between him and the first staunch defender of the Trinity, Athanasius. Athanasius taught that Jesus was every bit as much God in his essence as was the Father.

Constantine, who saw that the bitter exchange could lead to a further weakening of his Roman Empire, sought to find a solution to their theological impasse, even though he was in no position himself, as a theologian, to arbitrate the dispute. Nevertheless, he convened what would become known as the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. In short, after the arguments were heard, Constantine decided in favor of Athanasius, that Jesus was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. The byproduct of his decision is Nicene Creed. Even though it took on two other forms from the original, it is the original form that continues to receive criticism, even today, by ardent detractors of Trinitarianism, including, but not limited to, modern-day Unitarians, Oneness Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Muslims, Mormons, *et al.* The following illustration, though, will show that not only was Constantine, and more so Athanasius, correct in his final declaration—even though he would later recant on his decision and send Athanasius into exile—but that until the detractors actual deal with the biblical evidence without distorting it, then they do stand condemned for rejecting, not necessarily the Creed, but the Word of God which supports it.

Creedal Statement	Biblical Support
We believe in one God Father Almighty,	Ex. 8:10; 15:11; Deut. 4:35; 6:4; 32:39; 33:26; 2 Sam. 7:22; 22:32; 1 Kgs. 8:60; 2 Kgs. 19:19; 1 Chr. 17:20; Ps. 86:8; Is. 43:10; 45:5, 14, 18; 46:9; Jer. 10:6, 10; Mal. 2:10; Mk. 12:29, 32; Jn. 10:30; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19.
Maker of all things seen and unseen.	Gen. 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3-4; 5:1-2; 6:7; Deut. 4:32; Job 38:4; Ps. 89:11-12; 90:2; 102:25; 104:30; 148:5; Isa. 40:26; 41:20; 42:5; 43:7; 45:8, 12, 18; Mal. 2:10; Mt. 19:4; Mk. 13:19; Jn. 1:3; Acts 17:24; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 2:10; 3:9; Col. 1:16; 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:13; 4:3-4; Heb. 1:10; 3:4; 11:3; Rev. 4:11; 10:6.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,	Deut. 6:4; Jer. 10:6; Mt. 24:5, 23; Jn. 13:13; Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5; Heb. 1:12; 13:8.
the Son of God,	Mt. 8:29; 26:63-64; 27:54; Mk. 1:1; 3:11; 15:39; Lk. 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; Jn. 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31; Acts 9:20; Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 1 Jn. 3:8; 4:15; 5:5-13, 20.
Having been begotten [as] the only begotten out of the Father	Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn. 4:9.

This one is from the substance of the Father,	Jn. 10:30; 8:42; 13:3; 16:28, 30; 17:8; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:9; 2:9.
God out of God,	Jn. 8:42; 13:3; 16:28, 30; 17:8.
Light out of Light,	Jn. 1:4; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 46.
True God out of true God,	Jer. 10:10; Jn. 8:42; 13:3; 16:28, 30; 17:3, 8; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Jn. 5:20.
Begotten, not made,	Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn. 4:9.
Same substance with the Father;	Jn. 10:30; 8:42; 13:3; 16:28, 30; 17:8; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:9; 2:9.
Through whom all things became,	Isa. 66:2; Jn. 1:3; Rom. 4:17; 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:10; 2:10; Rev. 4:11.
The things in heaven and the those upon the earth;	Gen. 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3-4; 5:1-2; 6:7; Deut. 4:32; Job 38:4; Ps. 89:11-12; 90:2; 102:25; 104:30; 148:5; Isa. 40:26; 41:20; 42:5; 43:7; 45:8, 12, 18; Mal. 2:10; Mt. 19:4; Mk. 13:19; Jn. 1:3; Acts 17:24; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 2:10; 3:9; Col. 1:16; 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:13; 4:3-4; Heb. 1:10; 3:4; 11:3; Rev. 4:11; 10:6.
The one for us men even for our salvation came down and has been incarnated and became man,	Jn. 1:14; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 1:7.
Having suffered,	Mt. 16:21; 17:12; Mk. 8:31; 9:12; Lk. 9:22; 17:25; 22:15; 24:26, 46; Acts 3:18; 17:3; 26:23; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10; 1 Thess. 2:14; Heb. 2:18; 5:8; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2:21; 4:1, 13; 5:1.
And resurrected on the third day,	Acts 1:22; 2:24, 31-32; 3:15, 26; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33-34, 37; 17:18, 31; Rom. 1:4; 4:24; 6:4-5; 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Phil. 3:10; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:3, 21.
And ascended into the heavens,	Lk. 9:51; 22:69; Jn. 6:62; 20:17; Acts 1:2, 9-11; 7:55; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; Col. 3:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22.
And is coming to judge [the] living and the	Jn. 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 2

dead.	Tim. 4:1, 8; 1 Pet. 4:5.
And in the Holy Spirit.	Matt. 1:18, 20; 3:11, 16; 12:28, 32; 28:19; Mark 1:8; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11; Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-26; 3:16, 22; 4:1; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; John 1:33; 14:26; 20:22; Acts 1:2, 5, 8, 16; 2:4, 33, 38; 4:8, 25, 31; 5:3, 32; 6:5; 7:51, 55; 8:15, 17, 19; 9:17, 31; 10:38, 44-45, 47; 11:15-16, 24; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:8, 28; 16:6; 19:2, 6; 20:23, 28; 21:11; 28:25; Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 14; 9:1; 14:17; 15:13, 16; 1 Cor. 2:11, 14; 3:16; 6:19; 7:40; 12:3; 2 Cor. 6:6; 13:14; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; Phil. 3:3; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; 4:8; 2 Tim. 1:14; Titus 3:5; Heb. 2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8; 10:15; 1 Pet. 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Jn. 4:2; Jude 20.
And (but) those saying, that it (there) was a time when he was not, And previously he had not been, And that he became from non-being, Or declared to be from a different essence or substance, [or created] Changeable or alterable the Son of God These the Catholic [and Apostolic] Church anathematizes (condemns).	Matt. 16:19; 18:18; Jn. 20:23; Heb. 13:8.

From the preceding it should be clear that those who crafted the Nicene Creed have biblical precedence in everything they concluded. From beginning to end, each and every statement is backed by something that God had already revealed from Scripture. The Creed itself is nothing more than a systematized declaration of the Christian view of the persons of God the Father and His Son and their relationship in the Godhead. There is nothing novel or contrived about it, given the source of information used to arrive at its conclusions. Therefore, when those who contend that the Creed itself was something concocted by man, for man, they are either ignorant of what the Creed actually says or they are ignorant of the scriptural bases for it. And in that case, those who might be privy to discuss or argue the point with them would be better served, upon presenting the biblical case for the Trinity through the Creed, to simply walk away. It is one thing to carry on a rational discussion with those capable of rationality; it is something wholly other, and a waste of time, effort, and resources, to persist in trying to convince the irrational, the prejudiced, and condemned of something their eyes are too blinded to see and their soul is too calloused to admit.

Conclusion

From beginning to end the Bible speaks of the Trinitarian nature of God. That nature has been expressed in the image of man in Genesis and concludes with the Alpha and Omega in Revelation, where the plea of the bride of Christ is to “Come.” Opponents of the Trinity from early on have been in denial of the Trinity, either rejecting or distorting one aspect or another of the Bible’s teaching on the subject almost from the beginning. Nevertheless, the Scripture remains clear that not only is God the Father God, but that God the Son is God, and so is the Holy Spirit, while also maintaining that there is only one God, not three.

Of course, the biblical record is not balanced on the subject. The Old Testament itself does not provide nearly the number of references, nor specificity, when discussion of the subject is raised. What is necessary is that the person who is interested, approach the OT with a hermeneutic which seeks to allow the God’s word to shape his theology, rather than attempt to foist one’s theology upon God’s word. Unfortunately, in our contemporary climate of reader-response hermeneutics and relativistic approach to the truth, all of which breeds contempt for God and His word, too many would rather engage in the latter, rather than the former. The result is not only an abuse of Scripture, but a skewed theology that does not represent what is in Scripture. Worse yet, an exclusivist attitude sets in whereby the person becomes not only hostile toward the Trinity, but toward Christians and Christianity, often times leading to cultic behavior like that seen in the movements mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, when one turns to the New Testament, verse after verse and book after book is filled with continual references to the Trinity. The word “Trinity” itself does not appear, which is frequently a specious argument raised by those who engage in fallacious argumentation, but the concept itself definitely does. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit are linked together in numerous passages, many of which have been provided above and expounded upon. Moreover, both Jesus and the Holy Spirit’s deity are explained in unabashed clarity, while maintaining the monotheistic view of God. Again, what is necessary to discover these links is an open and honest inquiry into what the Bible *does* say, and not a hostile approach which turns to the Bible in an effort to do whatever is necessary to refute the biblical testimony, even if that mean twisting and perverting Scripture to suits one’s presuppositional prejudice and bias before ever picking the Bible up.

A final word should be said by way of refutation of those who mock the mysteriousness of the Trinity. Just because a Christian might state that the Trinity is a mystery in no way means that a nefarious contradiction is being made or that a concession of the possibility that the Trinity cannot exist is admitted. What is meant that man’s finite mind cannot absolutely and comprehensively explain the infinity of God’s existence. To do so would place man on the same level as God, and in that case one would be faced with a monumental contradiction in itself. So, to say that the Trinity is a mystery—that one Being can manifest itself in three distinct persons and yet remain One—is stating an absolute truth. It is something that will not be fully

understood until those who know God have had the darkened glass removed from their vision so that they can see God more clearly (1 Cor. 13:12). Until then, there is nothing to be ashamed of or to admit, that there are some things which God has revealed about Himself that we just do not completely understand. All one can do is admit that the Trinity is a biblical reality. The data proves it beyond a shadow of a doubt. Therefore, for those capable of acknowledging that reality, thankfulness is the order of the day for that which is understood, as well as humility for what remains a mystery.