

Chapter Seven

A Multi-Personal God

Trinitarians believe that while there is only one God, numerically speaking, yet, within this one God, there exists more than one person, ego, intellect or self. This is the fundamental principle underlying the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus it does not make much sense to discuss how many Persons there are in the Godhead and how They relate to each other until you have first established the multi-personal nature of God.

What to Expect

If the authors of the Bible believed that God was multi-personal, then we would expect to find that they would write about God in such a way as to indicate this idea to their readers. Thus, we must ask, “What would we expect to find in the Bible, if its authors believed that God was multi-personal?”

On the other hand, if the authors of the Bible believed that God was only one person, i.e., they were classic Unitarians, then they would write about God in such a way as to indicate that idea. Thus, we are also warranted to ask, “What would we expect to find in the Bible, if Unitarians wrote it?”

We will at times use the term “Unitarian” in its generic sense of anyone who denies the Trinity because he believes that God is only one person. This would include Jews, Muslims, Arians, and Modalists.

Let us examine the Old Testament to see whose position is verified by the Hebrew text keeping in mind the basic question, “What must be in order for what is to be what it is?”

The Oneness of God

The first question is how did the biblical authors, under the inspiration of God, conceive of the oneness of God? There are nine different Hebrew words which at times are translated as the word “one:”

אִישׁ, אִשָּׁה, יְהוּדִי, אֶלְמָנִי, אָקָד, גַּם, בְּדָד, חַד (Chal.),

While such words as אִישׁ (man) or אִשָּׁה (woman) are sometimes translated “one,” they are never applied to God. Since God is not a man or a woman (Num. 23:19), this is what we would expect to find. The same applies to the word נַפְשׁ (soul) which is never used to speak of the oneness of God.

The question that comes to mind at this point is, if Unitarians wrote the Bible, which word for oneness would they apply to God? Out of all the words above, there is only one word which would indicate that God is one solitary person. If this word is applied to God in the Bible, this would be quite damaging to the Trinitarian position.

The word is יְהִיד and means an absolute or solitary oneness.¹ It is even translated “solitary” in Psalm 68:6 (יְהִידִים) and refers to someone who is absolutely alone. This is its general meaning throughout Scripture.²

Unitarians should naturally expect to find that the word יְהִיד was applied to God in the Bible. On the other hand, Trinitarians would not expect to find יְהִיד used of God because they believe that there are three Persons within the Godhead.

Whose Expectations are Fulfilled?

When we turn to the Bible, what do we find? The authors of Scripture never applied יְהִיד to God. They never described God as a *solitary* person. This is quite damaging to the Unitarian position.

The Word אֶחָד

In the list of Hebrew words which speak of oneness, the word אֶחָד refers to a compound oneness in which a number of things together are described as “one.”³ The following sample passages illustrate this compound meaning of oneness:

1. Gen. 1:5: The יום אֶחָד (first day) is a combination of two things—the evening and the morning.
2. Gen. 2:24: Adam and Eve became לְבָשָׁר אֶחָד (one flesh). They were one, but two and two, but one.
3. Gen. 3:22: Adam and Eve became “one” (אֶחָד) with God. But they did not lose their personhood when they became “one” with God.
4. Gen. 11:6: The people were one (אֶחָד). They were, thus, “one” and “many” at the same time.
5. Gen. 34:16, 22: The Shechemites wanted to become “one people” (לְעַם אֶחָד) with the Jews.
6. 2 Chron. 30:12: God gave the people “one heart” (לֵב אֶחָד). Obviously, the thousands of individual hearts were “one” in a compound or composite sense.
7. Ezra 2:64: The “congregation” (כְּלֵי־הַקְּהָל) of forty two thousand, three hundred and sixty persons was described as “one” (כְּאֶחָד).
8. Jer. 32:39: Under the New Covenant, God will give His people “one heart” (לֵב אֶחָד).

The passages above are just a small sample of the many times אֶחָד is used of compound oneness. But it is enough to demonstrate beyond all doubt that the Old Testament, from the Law to the Prophets, used אֶחָד to express a unified or compound oneness.

¹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 402. This book will be referred to as B.D.B. from now on.

² It is found in Gen. 22:2, 12, 16; Jud. 11:34; Ps. 22:22 (21); 25:16; 35:17; 68:6 (7); Prov. 4:3; Jer. 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech. 12:10.

³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, 25f.

Who Would Use יהוה?

A Unitarian would never apply the Hebrew word יהוה to God because it means a compound or unified oneness. If the authors of the Bible were Unitarians, we would not expect to find יהוה applied to God.

On the other hand, if the writers of Scripture believed that God was multi-personal, then we would expect to find that they would apply יהוה to God because this would mean that God is “one” in a composite or compound sense. As a matter of fact, יהוה is the *only* available Hebrew word they could use to express this idea.

When we open the Bible, what do we find? We find that יהוה is applied to God. He is “one” in the sense of compound oneness. This is so central to the Old Testament concept of God that it is found in Israel’s Great Confession:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

“Hear, O Israel, [Yahweh] our God, Yahweh is one!” (Deut. 6:4)

The use of יהוה in Deut. 6:4 is exactly what Trinitarians expect to find in the Bible because it is the only way in the Hebrew language to indicate to the reader that God is a composite unity of several Persons and not just a solitary person. There are no other words in the Hebrew language by which such an idea could be expressed.

But how can this be the true understanding of יהוה when the Jews today reject the doctrine of the Trinity? The noted Hebrew scholar, David Cooper, explains:

Prior to the days of Moses Maimonides, the unity of God was expressed by יהוה which, as has been proved beyond a doubt, has as its primary meaning that of a compound unity. Maimonides, who drafted the thirteen articles of faith, in the second one sets forth the unity of God, using the word יהי which in the Tenach is never used to express God’s unity. From these facts it is evident that a new idea was injected into this confession by substituting יהי which in every passage carries the primary idea of oneness in the absolute sense for יהוה which primarily means a compound unity. Hence from the days of Maimonides on, an interpretation different from the ancient one was placed upon this most important passage.⁴

When you consider the use of יהוה in reference to God and the fact that יהי are never applied to God, the implication is obvious. God is a compound unity, i.e., multi-personal.

Singular and Plural Words

If the authors of Scripture believed there was only one God, how could they express this idea in the Hebrew language? The only way, in terms of Hebrew grammar, was to use singular nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs in reference to God. Thus, they would refer to God as “He,” “Him,” and “His” and describe God as saying, “I,” “Myself,” and “Me.” Both Unitarians

⁴ David L. Cooper, *The Eternal God Revealing Himself* (Harrisburg: Evangelical Press, 1928), 59–60.

and Trinitarians would expect to find the authors of Scripture using such words in reference to God.

But, if they also believed that God was multi-personal, the only way this idea could be indicated in the Hebrew was to use plural nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs. They would also refer to God as “They,” “Them,” and “Theirs” and describe God as saying, “We,” “Us,” and “Ours.”

Singular Words

While both Trinitarians and Unitarians expect to find singular words applied to God, because they both believe there is only one God numerically speaking, only Trinitarians expect to find plural words used of God as well. We have yet to see a Unitarian book in which God is referred to as “They” or “Them.” But this is standard practice in Trinitarian books.

An example of a singular name for God is found in Numbers 23:19:

“God (אֱלֹהִים) is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

In this verse, God is given the name אֱלֹהִים which is a singular noun. All the verbs which modify אֱלֹהִים in this verse are singular as well. The divine name אֱלֹהִים is transliterated in such places as Gen. 33:20 (*EL-Elohe-Israel*).

God is called בּוֹרֵא (Creator) in Isaiah 40:28, which is the singular form of the verb בָּרָא. He is also called וְיֹצֵר (Maker) in Isaiah 45:11, which is the singular form of יָצַר. Since there is only one God, we are not surprised to find singular nouns and verbs used of God.

Plural Words

But when it comes to plural nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs, this is not something which a Unitarian would expect to be applied to God in the Bible. We have yet to hear a Unitarian refer to God as “Them.” But this would be exactly what a Trinitarian would expect to find in the Bible.

If God is multi-personal, then we would expect to find God saying, “We,” “Us,” or “Our” as well as “I,” “Myself,” or “Me” because God is One and Three at the same time. The doctrine of the Trinity requires the plural as well as the singular while Unitarianism only requires the singular.

Who is Right?

Did the authors of the Bible use plural words for God? Yes, they did. The plural form of אֱלֹהִים is אֱלֹהִים, which is the most frequently used word for “God” in the Bible (i.e., Gen. 1:1).

The word אֱלֹהִים is translated as “gods” over four hundred times in the Bible. That it is a true plural is seen from the fact that it has plural verbs and plural adjectives modifying it. Several examples will suffice to demonstrate this point:

1. In Genesis 20:13a, we read:

And it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house

וַיְהִי כִּשְׁשָׁרִים הִתְעוּ אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי

The divine name is אֱלֹהִים and the verb which modifies it is הִתְעוּ (cause to wander) which is the plural form of תַּעַה. It can be translated, “When they, i.e., God, caused me to wander from my father’s house.”

2. In Genesis 35:7 we read, “They, i.e., God, revealed themselves to him.”

כִּי שָׁם נִגְלוּ אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים

The verb נִגְלוּ (revealed) is the plural form of גָּלָה and modifies אֱלֹהִים (God):

3. The word אֱלֹהִים in Exodus 21:6; 22:7–8, 27–28 refers to the “judges” of Israel. It is impossible to deny the composite nature of these judges.

4. In Deuteronomy 4:7 we read:

כִּי מִי־גוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֱלֹהִים קְרֹבִים אֵלָיו כִּיהְנָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל־קְרָאנוּ אֵלָיו:

The word קְרֹבִים (coming near) in Deut. 4:7 is a plural form of the word קָרַב and modifies אֱלֹהִים.

5. In Joshua 24:19 the word קְדוֹשִׁים (“holy”) is a plural adjective which modifies אֱלֹהִים and can be translated, “God, i.e., the Holy Ones.”

6. David said in Psalm 58:11(v. 12 in Heb.):

Surely there is a God who judges on earth!

אִךְ־פָּרִי לְצַדִּיק אֵךְ יִשְׁׁאֲלֵהֶם שְׁפָטִים בְּאָרֶץ:

David used the verb שְׁפָטִים “judges” in its plural form. A literal translation would be, “They, i.e., God, who judges the earth.”

Besides the plural noun אֱלֹהִים and all its plural modifiers, the authors of the Bible used other plural nouns as well:

1. The second most popular name for God in the Old Testament is אֲדֹנָי (Adonai, i.e., “Lord”) which is a plural noun. Thus, the two most frequently used names for God (אֲדֹנָי and אֱלֹהִים) in the Hebrew Bible are both plural nouns. This is not what we would expect if Unitarians wrote the Bible. But it is exactly what we would expect if the authors of the Bible believed that God was multi-personal.

2. Job 35:10 refers to God as the “Makers” of mankind. The word עֹשֵׂי (Makers) is a plural participle of עָשָׂה.

3. In Psalm 149:2, we read:

Let Israel be glad in his Maker; Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King.

יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֹשֵׂיו בְּגִי־צִיּוֹן יִגִּילוּ בַּמֶּלֶכִּים:

David uses the masculine plural בְּעֹשֵׂיוֹ “Makers” to refer to the God of Israel. What Unitarian would ever speak of God as his “Makers?” Only Trinitarians do this.

4. Ecclesiastes 12:1 tells us וְזָכַר אֶת-בּוֹרְאָיו (“Remember now your Creators”). The word בּוֹרְאָיו (“Creators”) is a masculine plural participle.

5. Isaiah 54:5 speaks of God as the “Makers” of Israel. The word “Makers” in the Hebrew is עֹשֵׂיָהּ which is a plural participle.

The Trinitarian has no problem whatsoever understanding how God can be described in the Bible as both the “Maker” and “Makers” of the universe at the same time because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all involved in the work of creation. But the Unitarian is hard put to explain why the Bible speaks of a plurality of Creators.

Gobbledygook

Trinitarians are often accused of theological gobbledygook when they say that, since God is one and three at the same time, God is both “Creator” and “Creators” at the same time. But this is exactly what the Hebrew text does. The same words for “Creator” and “Maker” are used in both their singular and plural forms.

Plural Pronouns

What about plural pronouns? Does God ever speak in the first person plural by using such terms as “Us,” “We,” and “Our?” If the authors of the Bible were Unitarian in belief, then we would not expect to find God speaking in the plural. But if Trinitarianism is true, then that is exactly what we would expect to find in the Bible.

The evidence is clear that plural pronouns are used in reference to God in the following passages:

Then God said, “Let **Us** make man **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. (Gen. 1:26–27)

First, the word “make” (בָּעָשָׂה) in the phrase “Let us *make* man” is a plural verb. The Hebrew grammar cannot be ignored. The main verb as well as the pronouns are *all* plural. This would indicate that God is the “Us” and “Our” who is speaking.

Second, that the plural pronouns refer to God and not to angels is clear from the *singular* nouns “image” and “likeness.” Man is not created in the two images or two likenesses—God’s and the angels. We are created in the image and likeness of God.

Third, this is also demonstrated by the repetition of the word “image” in verse 27. If the “image” in which man was created was reflective of angels as well as God, it would not have been rendered in the singular, but in the plural.

Fourth, some anti-Trinitarians have attempted to dismiss the passage as an example of the plural of majesty (*pluralis majestaticus*), much like Queen Victoria of England who is reported to have said, “We are not amused.”

The only problem with this argument is that there was no plural of majesty in the Hebrew language during biblical times. Rabbi Tzvi Nassi, a lecturer in Hebrew at Oxford University, explains:

Every one who is acquainted with the rudiments of the Hebrew and Chaldee languages, must know that God, in the holy Writings, very often spoke of Himself in the plural. The passages are numerous, in which, instead of a grammatical agreement between the subject and predicate, we meet with a construction, which some modern grammarians, who possess more of the so-called philosophical than of the real knowledge of the Oriental languages, call a *pluralis excellentiae*. This helps them out of every apparent difficulty. Such a *pluralis excellentiae* was, however, a thing unknown to Moses and the prophets. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, David, and all the other kings, throughout תּוֹרָה (the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa) speak in the singular, and not as modern kings in the plural. They do not say *we*, but I, command; as in Gen. 41:41; Dan. 3:29; Ezra 1:2, etc.⁵

An Amazing Hoax

During the nineteenth century debates between Unitarians and Trinitarians, the principle of *pluralis majestaticus* was revealed to be a hoax popularized by the famous Jewish scholar Gesenius. It became clear that he used it as a *ruse de guerre* against Christianity.

The fundamental error resided in the attempt to take a modern monarchical idiosyncrasy and read it back into an ancient text when such an idiosyncrasy was unknown at that time. Richard Davies in 1891 pointed out, “Indeed, this royal style is unknown in Scripture.”⁶

What is astounding is that, one hundred years later, the anti-Trinitarians are still using this hoax to dodge the significance of the use of plural pronouns in reference to God. They seem to be totally ignorant of the fact that it is a recent grammatical invention and, thus, cannot be read back into ancient times or texts.

We must also point out that anti-Trinitarians now apply the principle of *pluralis majestaticus* to all plural words of God when the principle really only relates to direct discourse, i.e., “Us” and “Our” passages. It is even invoked as a way to explain away the significance of the plural word אֱלֹהִים in such places as Genesis 1:1. But since Genesis 1:1 is not a direct discourse, the appeal to a supposed “plurality of majesty” is nothing more than a ruse.

The Fall of Man

Then [Yahweh] God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us.” (Gen. 3:22)

⁵ Tzvi Nassi, *The Great Mystery* (Jerusalem: Yanetz, 1970), 6.

⁶ Richard Davies, *Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Cranston & Stowe, 1891), 227.

God said that man “has become one with Us.” There is nothing in the context to indicate that God was speaking to angels. Thus the “Us” is God and reveals His multi-personal nature.

The Tower of Babel

“Come, let Us go down and, confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So [Yahweh] scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there [Yahweh] confused the language of the whole earth; and from there [Yahweh] scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. (Gen. 11:7–9)

The words “come” and “confuse” are both plural verbs. This fact, when combined with the plural pronouns and the identification of the “Us” as none other than Yahweh in the subsequent verses, makes the attempt to introduce angels as the ones to whom God is speaking, highly unlikely. When angels do have a hand in punishing man, they are given due credit (Gen. 19:1–26, etc.). No credit is given to the angels because they were not involved.

The Call of Isaiah

Then I heard the voice of [Yahweh], saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isa. 6:8)

Isaiah was called and sent by the Divine “Us.” Nowhere are angels introduced in the context. The “Us” is Yahweh speaking as a multi-personal Being. There is not a single text in all of Scripture where a prophet is described as a spokesman of angels.

Plural Persons

Another thing which Trinitarians expect to find in the Bible is that there will be places where it is clear that more than one person is God. This is decidedly not what Unitarians expect to find.

There are several passages where two divine persons are both called “God” in the sense of both being the one true God. The first passage is found in Genesis 19:24:

Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Yahweh out of heaven.

וַיִּהְיֶה הַמָּטֵיר עַל־סֹדֹם וְעַל־עֲמֹרָה גִפְרִית וְאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם:

This passage is remarkable regardless of how you deal with it. It simply states that there are two divine Persons: One on the earth and One in the heavens. Each Person is called יְהוָה (Yahweh).

The first יְהוָה (Yahweh) who is on earth brings down brimstone and fire from the second יְהוָה (Yahweh) who is in the heavens. It is easy to see why this passage has irritated anti-Trinitarians for centuries.

What are we to make of it? The Council of Sirmium decreed, “the Son of God brought down the rain from God the Father.”⁷ This was the clear interpretation of the Early Church.

The great German Reformer Martin Luther commented:

We may note also the fact that Moses here says that the Lord (Jehovah) rained fire and brimstone from the Lord (Jehovah). This mode of speaking greatly irks the Jews and they try in vain to explain it. But Moses mentions Jehovah twice to show that there is but one God, but that in this one God there are three distinct persons.⁸

One alternate interpretation is that the second Yahweh is simply a repetition for emphasis sake.⁹ But this interpretation has several insurmountable problems.

First, is it not clear that Moses is *contrasting* heaven and earth? Yes! Can anyone deny that they are juxtaposed? The fire comes *down* from the heavens to the earth *below*.

Is it not also clear that the two Yahwehs are part of this contrast? Yes. Are not the two Yahwehs clearly juxtaposed in the text? Yes. Just as the heavens cannot be interpreted as a repetition of the earth, neither can the first Yahweh be interpreted as a repetition of the second Yahweh.

The second problem with this interpretation is that there are no other passages in the Pentateuch where a name is repeated once at the beginning and again at the end for emphasis sake. Thus there is no evidence that Moses ever used such a literary device.

Dr. Herbert Leupold, who wrote one of the best commentaries on the book of Genesis in the 20th century, stated:

We believe that the view which the church held on this problem from days of old is still the simplest and the best: *Pluit Deus filius a Deo patre* = “God the Son brought down the rain from God the Father,” as the Council of Sirmium worded the statement. To devaluate the statement of the text to mean less necessitates a similar process of devaluation of a number of other texts like 1:26, and only by such a process can the claim be supported that there are no indications of the doctrine of the Trinity in Genesis. We believe the combined weight of these passages, including Genesis 1:1, 2, makes the conclusion inevitable that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is in a measure revealed in the Old Testament, and especially in Genesis. Why should not so fundamental a doctrine made manifest from the beginning? We may see more of this truth than did the Old Testament saints, but the Church has through the ages always held one and the same truth. Luther says: “This expression indicates two persons in the Godhead.”¹⁰

⁷ John Peter Lange, *Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 1:438.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 354.

⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 1:512.

¹⁰ Herbert Carl Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 570–571.

This is exactly the kind of text that the Trinitarian expects to find in the Bible.

Psalms 45:6–7 is another passage which bears close attention:

Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows.

כִּסֵּאֵךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד שִׁבְט מִיֶּשֶׁר שִׁבְט מַלְכוּתְךָ:

אַהֲבַת צְדָקָה וְתִשְׁנָא רָשָׁע עַל־כֵּן מִשְׁחָךָ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵיךָ שָׁמֹן שִׁשׁוֹן מִחֲבֵרֶיךָ:

David is clearly addressing the one true God when he says, “Thy throne, O God,” because the throne of the person being addressed is “for ever and ever,” i.e., eternal. Eternity is an attribute of deity.

Also, in other psalms, David identifies that throne as Yahweh’s throne (Ps. 11:4) from which in heaven He rules over all things (Ps. 103:19) for eternity (Ps. 93:2). This cannot be applied to David or to Solomon or to any other earthly king.

If this is all the passage said, no one would have the least difficulty in identifying God as the One to whom David is praying. The problem for the anti-Trinitarian is that David goes on to speak of God as being anointed by God!

How can the God of Israel sitting on His throne ruling the universe be anointed by God? For the Trinitarian, this is no problem at all. But for the Unitarian, this text represents a huge problem.

The historic Christian interpretation is that “it is clear from this passage that there are at least two Divine Personalities who are eternal and omnipotent.”¹¹ This was the ancient Jewish view as well. The classic German commentator, Franz Delitzsch, explains:

The Epistle to the Hebrew (ch. 1:8) proceeds on the assumption that it is the future Christ, the Son of God. It is supported in this view by a tradition of the ancient synagogue, in accordance with which the Targumist renders ver. 3, “Thy beauty, O King Messiah, is greater than those of the children of men.” This Messianic interpretation must be very ancient.”¹²

The greatest of the classic commentaries on the Psalms was written by the German scholar Hengstenberg. He pointed out:

The Messianic expositors take Elohim as the vocative, O God, in unison with: O hero, in ver. 3. That this exposition must be one that most readily and naturally occurs, appears even from the fact, that all the old translators, with whom also concurs the Ep. to the Hebrews, express the vocative.¹³

¹¹ Cooper, 47.

¹² Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 2. 73–74.

¹³ E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Works of Hengstenberg* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, n.d.), 6:133.

The Inescapable Vocative

The anti-Trinitarians have attempted to escape this passage by translating אֱלֹהִים כִּסֵּאֲךָ not as the vocative “Your throne O God,” but as “God is your throne” in order to avoid the obvious truth that there are two persons in this passage who are both called אֱלֹהִים.

After surveying all the attempts to translate the words in some other way than “O God,” Hengstenberg states that “they have not been able to bring forward anything grammatically tenable.”¹⁴ He concludes that “the construction of Elohim as vocative is the only one which can be grammatically justified.”¹⁵ As Prof. Plumer pointed out in his classic commentary on the Psalms:

Strenuous efforts have been made to turn aside this passage from its obvious and inspired interpretation.¹⁶

The underlying reason as to why anti-Trinitarians try so hard to escape the obvious meaning of the text is pointed out by Hengstenberg:

We can only ascribe it to the power which a prejudice, having once obtained a firm footing for itself at the beginning of rationalism, even now exerts over the minds of men, when a more impartial view of things is wont to be taken.¹⁷

We are once again thrown back to the issue of *a priori* assumptions. The liberal and the cultist assume that the Bible *cannot* speak of God as multi-personal. Thus, they always end up in circular reasoning instead of being open to the evidence.

The Lord Sent Me

Another passage which should be noted is Isaiah 48:12–17:

“Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. Surely My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together. Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? [Yahweh] or the LORD loves him; he shall carry out His good pleasure on Babylon, and His arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and He will make his ways successful. 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 identity of the speaker is clearly the God of Israel because He calls Himself “the first and last” in verse 12. This title had already been used of Yahweh of Hosts in Isaiah 44:6:

¹⁴ Ibid., 133.

¹⁵ Ibid., 134.

¹⁶ W.S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 516.

¹⁷ Hengstenberg, 124.

“Thus says [Yahweh], the King of Israel and his Redeemer, [Yahweh] of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.’ ”

The Hebrew for “I am the first and I am the last” is the same in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12: אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן אֶף אֲנִי אַחֲרֵיָן. This God is further identified as “the Yahweh of armies” in Isaiah 44:6.

The divine title “the first and the last” means that He is the first God and the last God because there are no other gods before or after Him. He alone is God.

The speaker in Isa. 48 is further identified by doing things which only God can do such as absolute foreknowledge (vs. 3, 5, 6), creation (v. 13), sovereignty (v. 15), and omnipresence (v. 16).

Who else but the one true God could say:

“For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.” (Isa. 48:11)

No one should have the slightest difficulty in identifying the speaker as God. The context of the passage and the grammar of the text are both very clear. But prejudiced anti-Trinitarians must object because the God who is speaking says that He, along with the Holy Spirit, are sent by God.¹⁸

“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.” (Isa. 48:16)

If the passage is interpreted in its natural and normal meaning, there are three persons in this passage who are all God! But how can God be sent by God unless there are several Persons within the Godhead? Since the Father sent the Son and the Spirit in Trinitarian theology, this is exactly the kind of passage which we expect to find.

How can non-Trinitarians handle a passage like this? They can’t. So they deny that the speaker is God and claim that it is actually Isaiah who is speaking in either verse 16b or the whole of verse 16!

The attempt to interject Isaiah into verse 16 falls before the following questions:

1. Is there anything in the Hebrew text to indicate a break in the speech of Jehovah? No.
2. Does Isaiah elsewhere in his book dare to interrupt the Almighty and to insert himself? No.
3. Is there any evidence whatsoever in the text to indicate that anyone else besides God is speaking? No.

¹⁸ The issue of whether the Spirit is sent by God along with the Speaker or whether the Speaker is sent by God and the Spirit, is not germane at this point. The Hebrew text reads, “And now Yahweh has sent me and His Spirit.”

4. Has any translation ever separated verse 16 from the rest of Jehovah's speech? No.
5. Does the Septuagint make a break in verse 16? No.
6. Do the Targums? No.

This passage is clear proof that the authors of the Bible believed that God was multi-personal. A Trinitarian would not have the least hesitation to write the text as it stands. But Unitarians, Arians, Modalists, and Muslims could never do so.

The Prophet Hosea

Isaiah is not the only prophet to depict God as the divine speaker and have Him refer to another person as God. The prophet Hosea recorded Yahweh (from verse 2) as saying:

“But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by [Yahweh] their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen.” (Hosea 1:7)

וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה אֲרַחֵם וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּים בִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא אוֹשִׁיעֵם בְּקִשָׁת וּבַחֶרֶב וּבַמִּלְחָמָה בַּסּוּסִים וּבַפָּרָשִׁים:

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

When Yahweh as the first person promised to deliver Israel as the second person by a third person called Yahweh, what other conclusion can we logically come to than that there are two persons each called Yahweh?

The “classic” commentary on the Minor Prophets was written by E.B. Pusey. He noted that the “Yahweh their God” through whom the deliverance came was none other than the Angel of Yahweh when he “smote in one night 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.”¹⁹ How was the deliverance accomplished?

The Father by the Son (in like way as it said, *Yahweh rained upon Sodom fire from Yahweh.*) They were saved in Christ, Yahweh and God of all, not by carnal weapons of warfare, but by the might of Him Who saved them, and shook thrones and dominions, and Who by His Cross triumphed over the hosts of the adversaries, and overcame the powers of evil.²⁰

The “Yahweh their God” was clearly a different person from the “Yahweh” who was speaking. Yet, they each were יהוה. While this is what Trinitarians expect to find in the Bible, Unitarians are continually frustrated by such passages.

¹⁹ E.B. Pusey's commentary book, *The Minor Prophets*, was republished in Barnes' *Notes on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), *Minor Prophets*, 1. 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

That the authors of Scripture believed that God was multi-personal can also be found in passages concerning the angel of Yahweh and the theophanies. This material is so vast that we must devote separate chapters to each subject.

Conclusion

The material presented in this chapter demonstrates that the one true God of Scripture was conceived of by the Patriarchs and the prophets as being multi-personal. The fundamental principle of the doctrine of the Trinity has been verified by the Old Testament.¹

¹ Robert A. Morey, [*The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*](#) (Iowa Falls, IA: World Pub., 1996), 87–103.