

“LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE” OR THE FIRST TIME GOD SPEAKS OF HIMSELF

First Draft Introduction

Throughout centuries theologians and philosophers have struggled with one of the greatest challenges of how to understand and define the Being of God.¹ On the one hand, there are both qualitative and quantitative differences in the Godhead alluded by the plural form of the Hebrew word for God “*Elōhîm*” and the plural pronouns “*Us*” and “*Our*.” On the other hand, the question arises about how to comprehend and explain the dynamic coexistence of the personal plurality in the Godhead in relation to its oneness?²

It is clear that our human, finite, limited mind, and reasoning within its functional range has neither capacity to grasp nor explain the reality of God’s existence and function or comprehend the nature of the infinite God.³ As Vernon McGee says, “But I confess that I find it to be an enigmatic mystery, an inscrutable riddle. I find that it is complicated, complex, bewildering, and impossible to explain.”⁴ Any speculation beyond His revelation is hopeless and

¹ The existence of God is universally demonstrated by His creation, which bear a powerful witness about its Creator (Rom 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15). However, this witness, apart from the revelation that God has given of Himself in the Scriptures, sends a limited and often distorted messages.

² See Deut 4:35, 39; 6:4; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:6; Zech 14:9; Matt 28:19; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:5–6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 226–261; Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000); Allan Coppedge, *The God Who Is Triune: Revisiting the Christian Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, InterVarsity Press, 2007).

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Through His Spirit: The Person and Unique Work of the Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 2003), 18. The author of an ancient adage has solemnly concluded that if you try to comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity, you may lose your mind, and if you deny it you will lose your soul.

in most cases will lead to ambiguous conclusions and theology.⁵ Humans should remember that “in the Bible itself God has revealed only as much of Himself as we need to know.”⁶

Indeed, in order to understand any passage of God’s revelation it is necessary to fully believe in His Word. It means without reservations to accept God’s disclosure of Himself and His will to His creation, which in the current context will be looked at from the perspective of “Us” and “Our” with special focus on the concept of “Trinity.”⁷

Though the doctrine of the Trinity functions as a deep mystery that cannot be fathomed by the finite mind, it is clearly taught in the Scripture. William Evans and S. Maxwell Coder are right when they say that “It is a doctrine to be believed even though it cannot be thoroughly understood.”⁸ The importance and practical implications of this doctrine cannot be overstated. The Trinitarian Godhead of Scripture functions as the very nucleus or center⁹ of biblical theology

⁵ Raoul Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12, Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001), 138–139.

⁶ Siegfried H. Horn, *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), 425.

⁷ The theological term “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, but the Trinitarian concept permeates the entire Book. The term “Trinity” is used to define God as an undivided unity expressed in the threefold nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is known that Tertullian, the great Latin Church father, was the first to develop the concept of *trinitas*--one God in three persons. Though the Church Fathers in the 2nd and 3^d centuries spoke of the three persons of the Godhead, while recognizing that there is only one God, only the councils of Nicea (A.D. 325) and Constantinople (A.D. 381) verbalized the Biblical doctrine. See Jerry M. Henry, “Trinity,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1625; Fernando L. Canale, “Doctrine of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald), 105–159; Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God’s Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002); Max Hatton, *Understanding the Trinity* (Alma Park Grantham, England: Autumn House, 2001), 26-29; Coppedge, *The God Who Is Triune: Revisiting the Christian Doctrine of God*.

⁸ William Evans and S. Maxwell Coder, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Enl. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 26.

⁹ Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, 138.

that draws together any known or imaginable dimension, whether it is anthropological, ecclesiological, missiological, soteriological, or eschatological truth.

The Appellation of God

Before we discuss the seven selected texts ((Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:3-7; Isa 6:8; Deut 6:4; Matt 28:19; John 1:1)), it is necessary to briefly pay attention to some key words.¹⁰ The Hebrew Scriptures use three different terms for “God:” *’El*, *’Elōah*, and *’Ēlōhîm* and the Greek *Theos*.¹¹ In a case of specific intents and purposes these words may function interchangeably.¹² The term *’Elōhîm* may have the plural meaning “gods” or the singular meaning of “a god,” or “God.” Usually, verbs and adjectives joined together with *’Elōhîm* are either singular or plural in order to be in harmony with the basic meaning of the term.

It should be noted that whenever the term *’Elōhîm* is employed to designate Israel’s true God,¹³ it is always paired with the verb in singular. For instance, in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God (*’Elōhîm*, plural) created (*bārā’*, singular) the heavens and the earth.” The same

¹⁰ This paper will discuss only some of the selected texts referring to the Godhead. Because of the time and space constraints it will not deal with the passages that refer to the “Angel of the Lord,” “Theophanies,” or related texts. All the quoted verses are taken from the New King James Version.

¹¹ According to Helmer Ringgren, the form *’elohim* occurs 2570 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, and according to Abraham Even-Shoshan it is found 2,603 times. See Helmer Ringgren, “אֱלֹהִים,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, trans. John T. Willis, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 1:272; Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer Publishing House, 1993), 69–74.

¹² Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis (NIDOTTE)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 405.

¹³ There are over one hundred descriptive names for God, such as, *Yahweh* (“LORD”), *Shadday* (“Almighty”), *El Shadday* (“God Almighty”), *Adonay* (“Lord”), *Elyon* (“Most High”), *El-Elyon* (“God the Most High”), *El Olam* (“The Eternal God”), *El Elohe-Yisrael* (“The God of Israel”), etc. See Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 459-468.

grammatical phenomenon¹⁴ is seen in the description of the creation story, where the phrase “God (’*Elōhîm*, plural) said (*wayyōmer*, singular)” is employed ten times.¹⁵

On the one hand, the divine name, ’*Elōhîm*, functions as a vehicle of God’s self-revelation; on the other hand, in order to determine the theological meaning and significance of the name, one must examine the given context in which the term occurs.

So far, there is no consensus among theologians what is the true meaning and what is the driving force behind the plural form for “God,” ’*Elōhîm*. According to Terence Fretheim, the plural form of ’*Elōhîm* may refer to intensification, absolutization, exclusivity, or majesty.¹⁶ It has also been assumed that the divine name designates not a plurality, but an intensification, which in that case would imply such concepts as the “great,” “highest,” or “only” God.¹⁷ In other words, ’*Elōhîm* would mean the “great God,” “highest God,” and finally “the only” God or God in general.¹⁸ The term ’*Elōhîm* by itself is neutral and only the framework of reference decides what the precise meaning of the word is.

The question repeatedly asked is, what is meant and how should we interpret the succinct but forceful expression: “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26). Does not it contradict the

¹⁴ The use of the singular verb is “grammatically unusual” because nouns and verbs usually agree in number. Yet this phenomenon is “stylistically normal” in the Old Testament. There are a few exceptions where “אֱלֹהִים” takes a plural verb (Gen 20:13, “caused to wander;” 35:7, “revealed;” 2 Sam 7:23, “went.”). By themselves these usages do not point to the Trinity, but in the context of the canonical references they are indicative.

¹⁵ See Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29. Other related texts are: Pss 33:6, 9; 148:5; Isa 55:11; Heb 11:3.

¹⁶ VanGemenen, *NIDOTTE*, 405. Concerning various plural interpretation theories see an excellent summary done by Jiří Moskala, “Toward Trinitarian Thinking in the Hebrew Scriptures,” *Journal of Adventist Theological Society* 21, no. 1-2 (Spring 2010): 245–275.

¹⁷ Ringgren, “אֱלֹהִים,” *TDOT*, 1:272–73. Gottfried Quell calls this the “plural of amplitude.” See “θεός” in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* 10 Vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 3:86.

¹⁸ W. Gesenius and E. Kautsch, *Hebräische Grammatik*. Halle, 1909 (= Kautsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* [Eng. tr., Oxford, 1910]), § 124 e, g.

biblical teaching of monotheism? Could it be that it is a divine statement alluding to the Trinitarian reality of the God of creation? What does this plurality reveal about *’Elōhîm* of the Hebrew Scriptures?

The First Time God Says “Let Us”

The first time God speaks of himself, He uses the plural pronouns “*Us*” and “*Our*.” “Let Us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26). The signal-words “*Us*” and “*Our*” that assume the function of nouns within the given sentence, require the presence of at least two persons. However, in the Hebrew language a noun may be singular, dual, or plural in number. When it is plural, and no definite number is ascribed, one can undoubtedly assume it to be three. The word *’Elōhîm* is neither singular nor dual but a plural noun.¹⁹ In spite of the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be derived solely from the individual plural form, a plurality within the unity of the Godhead may be established from the context.

It should be noted that in Genesis 1, God’s creative act is described by both plural and singular pronouns. In v. 26, the Hebrew has only one verb in the plural “let Us make” (*na’āšeh*) and two singular nouns with plural possessive pronouns or suffixes “in Our image” (*bēšalmēnû*) and “according to Our likeness” (*kidmûtēnû*),²⁰ and in v. 27, which explains v. 26, the singular pronoun, “in his image,” is used, meaning God’s image.”²¹

¹⁹ See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), § 7.4.3c, 122–24.

²⁰ Eugene H. Merrill, “Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Implied in the Genesis Creation Account? Yes,” in *The Genesis Debate*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1986), 120. The plural pronouns “Us” and “Our” were regarded by the early church theologians almost unanimously as indicative of the three persons of the Godhead. See Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 215.

²¹ Genesis 5:1 and 3 refers to the creation of humanity “in the likeness of God” (*bidmût ’ēlōhîm*), suggesting that the prepositions used with the nouns “image and likeness” are interchangeable in meaning.

Verse 27 contains three clauses that are in apposition.²² The first and second lines are arranged chiastically (inverted repetition) and the third line explains how a male and female are created in the image of God, and not in the image of a heavenly court or angels:²³

So **God** created man *in his own image*
in the image of God he created him
male and female he created them

The focus of the middle line of the chiastic structure is on the image of 'Elōhîm. It means that the God (plural), who creates man in His image (singular), creates him also in plural. Moreover, this unity in plurality concept is clearly mirrored in unmistakable words in Genesis 2:24.²⁴ The sameness that man and the woman have been created in the image of God does not mean exactness.

It is obvious that in Genesis 1:26 and 27 the unity and plurality of God are meant. The plural points not only to an existing intra-divine relationship but also indicates an ever-present communication in the Godhead between God and other associated divine beings.²⁵

Moreover, the clearly specified reference to “the Spirit of God” (*Rûaḥ 'Elōhîm*) in Genesis 1:2 alludes to His co-participation with God in the forthcoming creation process, preparing the “earth” for the creative Word (See Ps 104:30). In fact, from this point onward, throughout the entire biblical canon, the Spirit of God—who is also called the Holy Spirit or the third person of the Godhead—functions as the divine agent of God in every imaginable creative act, whether it be the creation of the earth, redemption His people from Egyptian slavery and

²² Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Mouton, 1974), 55.

²³ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 172. See also Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary (WBC)* (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1998), 33.

²⁴ The concept of unity between “man” (*'ish*) and “woman” (*'ishah*) is also expressed by the similarity of the sounds in the Hebrew words.

²⁵ D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968):62–69; Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 50-52; Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Meaning of ‘Let us’ in Gn 1:26,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 (1975): 58–66.

creation of a new nation, creation of new life or a new heart.²⁶

Thus, the phrase “Let us make man in our image” in Genesis 1:26 explicitly points to plurality of persons, who function, coexist, and are of the same Godhead. This phenomenal self-revelation of God in its immediate context alludes to the doctrine of the Trinity. In spite of the plural form for God (*'Elōhîm*), the true Jewish belief and teaching was strongly monotheistic.²⁷

The term *'Elōhîm* describes God, Who is sovereign and mighty, distant and transcendent, a universal God Creator, as Brad Creed correctly emphasizes, “God is absolute, infinite Lord over creation and history. The Christian sees in this term a pointer to the Trinitarian reality of creation.”²⁸ That this is an appropriate conclusion is confirmed by the intertextuality of the biblical canon, which contains specific references to God and His self-disclosure in a variety of ways.

It should be reminded that the Church Fathers, such as Justin Martyr, Barnabas, Irenæus, Epiphanius, Theophilus, and Theodoret, saw in *'Elōhîm* an allusion to the Trinity. Concerning the pluralization of the term, its revelation in general, and the adoption of the plural name *'Elōhîm* specifically, one can be sure that the Holy Spirit directed the entire process with a view to the future unfolding of truth with regard to the Trinity.²⁹

²⁶ Roland J. Lowther, “Spirit,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014). The Hebrew Scriptures describe the Spirit of God enabling people to accomplish God’s purposes through artistic skill (Exod 31:3), governance (1 Sam 16:13), and prophecy (Neh 9:30). The Spirit breathes new life into the redeemed people of God (Ezek 37:1–10).

²⁷ As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew Scriptures use the plural form, *'Elōhîm*, when referring to pagan gods specifically, to emphasize the polytheistic nature of their worship. On the other hand, there is no information from the external sources that the people of the ancient Near East had used the plural of *'el* in order to refer to any one of their particular gods. The question should be asked: Why only the Hebrews use the plural form when referring to their only and one God and what is the rationale behind it?

²⁸ Brad Creed, “Names of God,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1172.

²⁹ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 317–319.

The Second Time God Says “Us”

“Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil . . .’” (Gen 3:22). Unfortunately, the erroneous translation of this verse has generated unnecessary theological misunderstandings and interpretations in a broader context. The literal translation of the phrase should be: “Behold, the man was (*hāyāh*, qal, perfect, 3d, m. sing.; Gen 3:1) like one of Us.” Adam and Eve were already created in His image and were “like God” (Gen 1:26). Strangely enough that after the Fall, they found themselves, “like God,” but no longer “with God.”

When God employs the pronoun “Us” the second time to address a concrete problem, He uses another divine name “Lord” (*Yahweh*),³⁰ which is linked with the name “God” (*’Elōhîm*). *Yahweh* (noun proper, no gender, no number)³¹ is the personal name of Israel’s God. It is never used in relation to any pagan deity. Consequently, *Yahweh* as God’s “name” conveys His uniqueness; the very essence of who He is. *Yahweh* is an imminent, intimate, personal, covenant God, the initiator of unique covenant relationships with humanity.³² He is the one and the only God.

³⁰ The Tetragrammaton YHWH, the LORD, or Yahweh, the personal name of God and His most frequent designation in Scripture occurs 5321 times in the Old Testament. G. Kittel, and G. W. Bromiley, *TDNT*, 3:1067; J. Barton Payne, “יְהוָה,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 210. However, according to Lawrence O. Richards, the name Yahweh, occurs 6,828 times; Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991), 64.

³¹ “The data reveal that it is impossible to state indisputably what יהוה means. All attempts at etymological interpretation, which are also attempts to convey the religious content of the word and which are affected by particular theories about this, suffer from ambiguity,” see G. Kittel and G. W. Bromiley, *TDNT*, 3:1069.

³² First time *Yahweh ’Elōhîm* occurs in Gen 2:4. This unusual merger of names occurs 20 times in Genesis 2-3, which means that there is special intention and place for the union of names. See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I. From Adam to Noah, Genesis I–VI:8*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 86–88.

Here, this personal God, *Yahweh 'Elōhîm*, specified as “Us” in plural, encounters Adam and Eve, who had transgressed the established boundaries. God’s confrontation with the first couple takes place in the context of their sin which leads to the very first judgment scene in the Hebrew Scriptures (3:8-20). This chapter provides a unique information about the tempter (3:1), the essence of the temptation (3:2-7), the trial and interrogation (3:9-13), verdict (3:14-20), God’s grace and protection (3:21) and the deportation from the garden into exile (3:22-24). The paradoxical dilemma that yesterday “the man was like one of Us,” but is no more today, is centered in the context of multifaceted and multi-dimensional “theology of sin, judgment and grace.”

The Third Time God Says “Let Us”

³ And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.

⁴ And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

⁶ And the LORD said, “Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech” (Gen 11:3-7).

This is another passage where highly anthropomorphic imagery “*let Us*” demonstrates the dynamics of interaction between God and His creation (vv. 5, 6).³³ Usually the revelation of both His immanence and His glory is expressed by the phrases “let us go down” (*nēr^edâ*) or “the LORD came down” (*wayyēred*; qal. imperf. see v. 5).³⁴ The coming down of *Yahweh* usually takes place either against the background of the rapidly approaching judgment or other

³³ Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 534.

³⁴ The account is structured in antithetical parallelism and chiasm. Everything that mankind planned in the first half (Gen 11:3–4) was undone in the second (vv. 5–9) with the climax located in v. 5, “The LORD came down.”

significant events. The personal name of God, *Yahweh*, in verses 5 and 6 implies plurality, as it is clearly emphasized in v. 7 by “Let Us.”

These few verses explain how the nations came to be scattered all over the face of the earth. In Genesis 1:28 God commanded to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,” but the record in Genesis 11:1-8 describes an organized human resistance and its driving force, which can be identified as human pride, total independence from God, and self-sufficiency.

There are three speeches: in the first (Gen 11:3) and the second (11:4) speeches the subject is “they.” In the third, God himself is the subject (11:6–7). In the first two cases people speak one to another; in the third one the speaker is God Himself. These three discourses contain three cohortatives and four mutual exhortations,³⁵ which have only one goal: “So that we may not be dispersed over the face of the entire earth” (11:4).

In order to counteract clear God’s command “to replenish the earth,” to avoid being scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth, and to make a name for themselves, the humans set up their own agenda. The focus of this new blueprint is on “us”, “let us make bricks,” “let us build ourselves a city,” “let us make a name for ourselves ((vv. 3, 4),” thus we will be able to escape another flood. In response to the human “let us” God counteracts with His “*Let Us*”: “Let us go down and confuse their language” (v. 7). Against the “Come, let us make bricks” (*hābā nilb^enā l^ebēnīm*), “Let us make for ourselves name” (*nibneh-lānū šēm*), against the “us” of the people (cohortative), *Yahweh* places the “*Us*” of Himself (cohortative), “Come,

³⁵ Concerning the chiasmic structure of Genesis 11:1–9, see Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasm in Tora”, *LB* 19 (1972), 12–23; Radday, ‘Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative’, in *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (ed. J.W. Welch; Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 50–117; Isaac M. Kikawada, “The Shape of Genesis 1–11”, in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of J. Mulenberg* (ed. J.J. Jackson and M. Kessler; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974), 18–32; Jan Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica, 17; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*. WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 135–47. For an Antithetical Structure of Genesis 11:1–9 see, Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 235.

let *Us* confuse” (*hābā ... w^enāb^elā*). Thus, *Yahweh* (implying the plurality of the Godhead) “comes down,” “sees,” “says,” and “acts.” Consequently, the strength and unity of the people is quickly destroyed by confusing their language and scattering them over all the earth.³⁶

The Fourth Time God Says “Us”

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here *am* I! Send me’” (Isa 6:8).

According to Isaiah 1, the setting of this chapter describes the sanctuary scene, which is rich in various contrasts: The Lord (*'Adōn 'āy*, v. 1) and the death of king Uzziah; the holy Lord of hosts (*qādōsh, qādōsh, qādōsh, Yahweh Š^ebā'ōt*, v. 3) and Isaiah³⁷ with his people, all of whom have unclean lips; the approaching judgment and grace manifested by the promise of the remnant; etc.

This passage has a cluster of different Hebrew words for God both of which are translated as the “Lord.” In verse 1, the word translated with the “Lord” is *'Adōn 'āy*. When *'Adōn* appears in the special plural form, with a first common singular pronominal suffix (*'Adōn 'āy*), it always refers to the true God of Israel and never is applied to pagan deities. The term, *'Adōn 'āy*, functioning as a grammatical plural with the verb in singular (*yōshēb*), is another title for God (*'Ēlōhīm*).³⁸ Just as the plural of *'Ēlōhīm* is referred to as the plural of completeness, fullness, fellowship, or plural of majesty, the same is true concerning the term, *'Adōn 'āy*.

³⁶ Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 45.

³⁷ The New Testament refers to Isaiah’s call and commissioning five times: Matt 13:14, 15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:26, 27.

³⁸ The Hebrew title for God, *'Adōn 'āy*, occurs in the plural form more than 300 times, mostly in Psalms, Lamentations, and the latter prophets.

In verses 3 and 5, God is designated as “the lord of hosts” (*Yahweh Šēbā’ôt*). The noun *šēbā’ôt* functions exclusively as a divine epithet and is never used alone.³⁹ In v. 5, *Yahweh Šēbā’ôt* is preceded by the word “the “King” (*eth-hammelekh*); thus, as a predicate of royal dominion, power, and majesty, it unmistakably points to His divine kingship.⁴⁰

According to J. Pohle and A. Preuss, the phrase “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of Hosts” is “the clearest allusion to the mystery of the Blessed Trinity,” “which is rightly made much of by many Fathers.”⁴¹ Brevard Childs concludes that from a Christological understanding, the book of Revelation (Rev 4:8) found a reflection of the triune God in the song of the seraphim: “Holy, holy, holy (Isa 6:3).”⁴²

The trifold repetition of the adjective “Holy” refers to an ecstatic vision of the Godhead, by which Isaiah was solemnly called to prophetic ministry. This “dynamic reality”⁴³ is revealed in His “glory” (*kābôd*). The impact of this distinctive image of God totally changes Isaiah’s perception of God and his life.

“Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” is the question. The singular “I” (*eshlah*, qal, imperf. 1 pers. sing.) in the first part of the question is turned into the plural “us” in the

³⁹ See Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “צְבָאוֹת,” *TDOT*, 12:216.

⁴⁰ In the Old Testament God is called “the king” 47 times. See Gary V. Smith, “The Concept of God/the gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible,” *Trinity Journal* 3 (1982):18–38; See also Mark Zwi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

⁴¹ Joseph Pohle and Arthur Preuss, *The Divine Trinity: A Dogmatic Treatise*, Dogmatic Theology (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1915), 12.

⁴² Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 368. Isaiah was in the temple and heard the seraphim saying, “Holy, holy, holy”— not twice, not four times, but three times. It could well be the praise to the triune God.

⁴³ Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 266. W. Eichrodt defines God’s holiness as “a marvelous power, removed from common life ... unapproachable because of his complete ‘otherness’ and perfection.” Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J. A. Baker; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:271–73.

second part. The plural pronoun “*Us*” points to the pluralistic unity of the Godhead. One God speaks, but three distinct persons in the Godhead are involved. If God says “*Us*,” what can the meaning of the “*Us*” be, except to emphasize a real plurality of persons in the Godhead?

It is a clear reference to the trinity of persons in the one Godhead.⁴⁴ The Hebrew Scriptures speak of the Name of God, always in the singular, which encompasses a plurality of fullness,⁴⁵ as it can be seen in the current passage. This singular-plurality is the “plurality of Persons”⁴⁶ and Isaiah responded to the question of the Godhead by the statement of readiness and obedience, “Here am I! Send me.”

How Many is One?

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! (Deut 6:4)

The sentence is a part of a covenant context and starts with the imperative: “Hear” (*Šema*, qal, impv. 2nd pers. masc. sing.), which basically means “to obey” individually and collectively. To “hear” God without acting in accordance with His Word means not hearing Him at all. The *Shema* is the very first in a series of six imperatives that control verses 4–9: “Hear,” “Love,” “Impress,” “Speak,” “Bind,” and “Write.”⁴⁷

The *Shema* (with v. 7) functions not only as a dominant theological text, but also as a

⁴⁴ The New Testament teaches that there is a plurality of persons in the Godhead. The plural is used “to cover an aspect of the Godhead which is specifically Hebraic, viz., the conception that God is both singular and plural at one and the same time.” See G. A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity*, SJT Occasional Paper No. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), 19; David L. Cooper, *The Eternal God Revealing Himself to Suffering Israel and to Lost Humanity*, 43–46; Merrill, “Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Implied in the Genesis Creation Account? Yes,” 117–21.

⁴⁵ Hasel, “The Meaning of ‘Let us’ in Gn 1:26,” 65.

⁴⁶ Hatton, *Understanding the Trinity*, 26. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 254.

⁴⁷ Daniel I. Block, “How Many Is God? An Investigation Into The Meaning Of Deuteronomy 6:4–5,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 1–2 (2004): 183–212.

theological confession, the *credo par excellence* of Judaism. It is recited daily as a duty and proclamation of faith.⁴⁸ It is the foundational core of Israel's faith and the heart of the entire law, which entails multiple blessings. It proclaims the unity and uniqueness of God: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (*Šema Yišrāēl, Yahweh 'ēlōhēnū' Yahweh 'eḥād*).

Peter Craigie explains that "the Shema is to the Decalogue what the Decalogue is to the full corpus of covenant stipulations (*w'ē 'āhabtā eth-yahweh 'ēlōhēnū' b'kōl lēbābkā ūbēkol napšekā ūbēkol m'ōd*)."⁴⁹ But it also is first and greatest because it is a commentary on the very first of the Ten Commandments—"You shall have no other gods [*'Ēlōhîm*] before me" (*Lō' yihyē lēkha 'ēlōhîm 'āḥērîm 'al pānāy*, Deut 5:7).

Samuel R. Driver called the *Shema* (6:4–9) "the fundamental truth of Israel's religion," that is, the "oneness" of God (v 4), and "the fundamental duty founded upon it," that is, love of God (v 5).⁵⁰ Craigie notes that both of these commandments are taken up in the New Testament teaching of Jesus (Mark 12:29–30; Matt 22:37; Luke 10:27).⁵¹ "These words" (*haddēbārîm hā' 'ēlleh*) are to be memorized and understood by every person of the community (vv. 6-9). Nothing can be more important for God's people than living according to "these words."

The most important word in this short, six-word, sentence is "one" (*eḥād*). Usually, its dynamic force is most effectively applied and best demonstrated in the context of the many.⁵² On the one hand, "one" is not a title or name of God, but an adjective of quality,⁵³ but it has

⁴⁸ Mishnah Berakoth 1:4; 2:2.

⁴⁹ Peter Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 169–70.

⁵⁰ Samuel Rolles Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (T&T Clark: 1902), 89.

⁵¹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 168.

⁵² J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4–5)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (July 1987): 280-300.

⁵³ See *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–) 1:180.

tremendous theological significance because of a double emphasis on the uniqueness and oneness of Godhead. On the other hand, this oneness of God is already accentuated and later explained throughout the biblical canon.⁵⁴ The term “one” (*ehād*) here specifies a composite oneness, in which “one” functions as both one and many simultaneously (Gen 2:24; Exod 12:49; 24:3; Judg 20:1; Ezra 3:1; Jer 32:39; Ezek 37:17). Moreover, this unique oneness of the Godhead is demonstrated by the functional unity in relation to the divine plan of redemption and action, intention and execution in the covenant contexts.

It should be emphasized that the word *’ehād* (“one”)⁵⁵ does not mean that God is lonely. There are two other Hebrew terms “*bāḏad*”⁵⁶ and “*yāhîd*”⁵⁷ that specifically show that a person is “solitary,” “alone” “lonely,” “abandoned,” or “isolated.” The oneness, uniqueness, and plurality of the biblical monotheism represents a dynamic interaction and fellowship not only among the Persons of the Godhead (*Yahweh ’Elōhîm*) itself, but also among Himself and His entire creation, as it is witnessed by the entire biblical canon. The term, “one,” characterizes God’s exclusivity, uniqueness, primacy over all the pretenders to deity and refers to His universal dominion.⁵⁸

God’s Self-Revelation in Matthew 28:19

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

⁵⁴ See Exod 20:3; Deut 4:35, 39; 32:39; 5:7; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:6; 45:14; 46:9; Zech 14:9; Mark 12:29; John 17:11, 21–23; 1 Cor 8:4; 10:17; James 2:19.

⁵⁵ See H. Ben-Shammai, “Qirqisani on the Oneness of God,” *JQR* 73 (1982): 105–11; Robert W. L. Moberly, “Yahweh Is One: The Translation of the Shema,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch* VTSup 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 209–215.

⁵⁶ Gen 36:35; Lev 13:46; Deut 32:12; 33:28; 1 Chr 1:46; Isa 27:10; Jer 15:17; 49:31; Lam 1:1; 3:28. Nola J. Opperwall, “Lonely,” ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 155.

⁵⁷ See Gen 22:2, 12, 16; Judg 11:34; Pss 22:21; 25:16; 35:17; 68:7; Prov 4:3; Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech 12:10; Robert L. Alden, “יָחִיד (yāhîd),” VanGemeren, *NIDOTTE*, 434–435.

⁵⁸ Stephen T. Hague, “Review of The Task of Old Testament Theology. Method and Cases by Rolf P. Knierim,” *Ashland Theological Journal Volume 29* 29 (1997): 128–129.

What is vitally important in the context of the current study is the analysis of the key term “the name” (*to onoma*; noun, accusative, neuter, singular) in Matt 28:19. Jesus does not say “baptizing them into the names of” (*eis ta onomata*, plural). He does not say, “Into the name of the Father, and into the name of the Son, and into the name of the Holy Spirit,” as if He were referring to three totally different Beings.⁵⁹ In this connection Benjamin Warfield makes a clear statement, “With stately impressiveness [He] asserts the unity of the three by combining them all within the bounds of the single Name; and then throws up into emphasis the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article: ‘Into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’”⁶⁰ The expression “*eis to onoma*” corresponds to the Hebrew “*l’sēm.*”

The prepositional phrase, following a participle clause, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” (*baptizontes autous eis to onoma tou patros kai tou huiou kai tou hagiou pneumatos*) clearly specifies not only the goal of baptism, but also the functional relationship of the Trinity to it. In the *Koine Greek* the prepositions “in” (*en*) and “into” (*eis*) are used interchangeably. In order to emphasize a specific theological truth, Matthew employs the preposition “into” (*eis*).⁶¹ In the current context the preposition “into” (*eis*) can mean: “in order that they may enter into a relationship with” or “in order that they may belong to.”⁶² Robert Gundry interprets it as a “coming-into-relationship-with” or a “coming under-the-

⁵⁹ According to Shedd, there are twelve aspects which show a distinct nature of each Person of the Godhead. See William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2nd ed. 3 vols. (T. Nelson, 1980) 1:279.

⁶⁰ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford, 1929), 153.

⁶¹ See James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 4 vols., vol. 3: *Syntax* by Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: Clark, 1963), 254–55.

⁶² Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, 587; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark (1845), 2000), 3:685.

Lordship-of-the Triune God.”⁶³ According to D. Carson, it is “a sign both of entrance into Messiah’s community and of pledged submission to His lordship.”⁶⁴

It should be noted that verses 18–20 form a chiasmic structure ⁶⁵with the apex in v. 19, “baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” thus bringing the Gospel of Matthew to its highest climactic and most forceful point and conclusion:

- A. Authority (*pasa exousia*, v. 18b)
- B. Making disciples (*mathēteusate*, v. 19a)
- C. Baptizing into the Name (*baptizontes autous eis to onoma*, v. 19b)
- B¹. Teaching (*didaskontes*, v. 20a)
- A¹. Presence (*egō meth’ hymōn eimi*, v. 20b)

The succinct phrase in A¹ “with you” (*meth’ hymōn*) alludes to *Emmanouēl* (Matt 1:23). That is the name given to Jesus, meaning “God with us” (*Meth’ hēmōn ho theos*). If to follow this train of thought, then Jesus’ reference to the Holy Trinity in Matthew 28:19 functions as a powerful connecting link with Genesis 1. Moreover, Jesus self-designation references, “I Am” (*egō eimi*) here and in John 4:26; 6:35; 8:12, 58; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6 are clear identification marks of his deity. In the Hebrew Scriptures, *Yahweh* had repeatedly assured his people of his holy presence with them.⁶⁶ The doctrine of the Trinity, which is at the very center of the doctrine of God, which is functional behind the creation story, was summarized by Jesus Himself. The Hebrew Scriptures teach and the New Testament⁶⁷ reaffirms the strict monotheism, namely, God

⁶³ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 596.

⁶⁴ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 8:597; Willoughby C. Allen, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 3d ed., ICC (Edinburgh: Clark, 1912), 305-306

⁶⁵ See Hans Schieber, “Konzentrik im Matthäusschluss: Ein form- und Gattungskritischer Versuch zu Mt 28,16–20.” *Kairos* 19 (1977) 286–307.

⁶⁶ J. Knox Chamblin, *Matthew: A Mentor Commentary*, Mentor Commentaries (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2010), 1498.

⁶⁷ Some of the New Testament Trinity texts are: 1 Cor 12:4–6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 2:18; 3:14–17; 4:4–6; 2 Thess 2:13–15; Hebr 6:4–6; 1 John 3:23, 24; 4:2; Jude vs 20, 21; Rev 1:4, 5.

is both singular and plural at one and the same time.⁶⁸

God's Self-Revelation in John 1:1

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”
(John 1:1).

John 1:1, *En archē(i) ēn ho logos, kai ho logos ēn pros ton theon, kai theos ēn ho logos*, is the text of particular significance, as it embraces manifold theological aspects and entails tremendous implications for understanding the doctrine of Trinity and the nature of Jesus' divinity in relation to God. There are only three short phrases. The question to be answered is whether the last clause affirms the equal divine status of Jesus as “the Word” (*ho logos*) with God the Father.⁶⁹

It should be pointed out that John does not refer to Christ by His name but as “the Word” (*ho logos*).⁷⁰ “The Word” paired with the verb “was” (*ēn*) is mentioned three times, once in each clause. The verb “was,” as the imperfect tense of the verb “to be” (*eimi*), describes a state of being. It should be noted that in v. 3, John speaks about the creation where he uses the verb “to become, to be made, to come into being” (*egeto*). The same verb is employed in v. 10, which described how the world “came into being” (*egeto*). But “the Word” (*ho logos*) did not come into being. He already “was” (*ēn*) there, which functions as a powerful affirmation of the deity of the Word. According to Fredrick Long, the rhetorical structure of the Greek text interconnects

⁶⁸ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 485; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 14.

⁶⁹ Fredrick J. Long, *Kairos: A Beginning Greek Grammar* (Mishawaka, IN: Fredrick J. Long, 2005), 50.

⁷⁰ The fact that “the Word” (ὁ λόγος) in John 1:1 refers to Jesus Christ becomes clear only in the following verses (John 1:1, 4-5, 6-11, 14, 17-18; Rev 19:13).

“the Word” (*ho logos*) with “God” (*Theos*), “thus affirming the full deity of the Word, Jesus, in eternal fellowship with God, the Father.”⁷¹

The statement of the very first clause “in the beginning was the Word” (*En archē(i) ēn ho logos*) refers to Genesis 1:1. Both texts speak about one and the same event, namely, the creation (See John 1:3) and as Karen Jobes points out, “the Word” (*ho logos*) was the agent of creation.⁷² Albert Nida explains that the phrase “in the beginning was the Word” (*En archē(i) ēn ho logos*) can be translated as “before the world was created, the Word (already) existed” or “at a time in the past when there was nothing.”⁷³ In other words, John emphasizes the preexistence of “the Word” by the presence of the verb “was” (*ēn*) that brings out the fundamental truth of this phrase. Literally, it could and should be rendered “When the beginning began, the Word was already there.” This is the basic meaning of the verb “was” (*ēn*), which is in the imperfect tense implies continuing existence in the past. So before the beginning began, the Word was already there. This is equivalent to saying that the Word existed before time and Creation.

The second phrase, “The Word was with God,” operates as an affirmation of the Word’s (*Logos*) uniqueness. The preposition “with” (*pros*) indicates both equality and distinction of identity. A. Robertson says, “The literal idea comes out well, ‘face to face with God.’”⁷⁴ Thus, his imagery picture implies both personality and coexistence with God. Robertson points out that the text addresses “the fellowship between the Logos and God.”

The last phrase, “The Word was God,” is particularly significant. This is a clear declaration of Christ’s deity, especially in the light of the fact that the noun “God” (*theos*) lacks

⁷¹ Long, *Kairos: A Beginning Greek Grammar*, 51–52.

⁷² Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 45.

⁷³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 636.

⁷⁴ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Broadman Press, 1934), 623.

the article. In spite of confusion among some theologians, Robertson has clearly demonstrated that the lack of the article in the predicate is intentional so that the main subject is clear and recognizable. In other words, in the phrase “and God was the Word” (*kai theos ēn ho logos*) were it not for the article “*ho*” before the word *logos*, the subject of the phrase would be ambiguous and uncertain. But the presence of the article shows that it is the “Word” that is the subject. The fact that the noun “God” functions as a predicate informs the reader that it is describing not only the nature of the Word (*Logos*); but also that He is of the same nature and essence as the noun in the predicate; that is, the Word is divine.⁷⁵

In this context, D. A. Carson presents a terse summary: “In short, God’s ‘Word’ in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of that ‘Word’ makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God’s ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son.”⁷⁶ And Warfield comes to the same conclusion:

This is a direct ascription to [Yahweh] the God of Israel, of a threefold personality, and is therewith the direct enunciation of the doctrine of the Trinity. We are not witnessing here the birth of the doctrine of the Trinity; that is presupposed. What we are witnessing is the authoritative announcement of the Trinity as the God of Christianity by its Founder, in one of the most solemn of His recorded declarations. Israel had worshiped the one only true God under the Name of [Yahweh]; Christians are to worship the same one only true God.⁷⁷

In fact, our understanding of any part of the Scripture depends on our acceptance of God’s self-disclosure, which in the current context is represented by the term *Trinity*. It can be affirmatory stated that the Trinity is the point in which all the biblical doctrines and teachings

⁷⁵ Ibid., 767.

⁷⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 116.

⁷⁷ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford, 1929), 155; David Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew’s Gospel.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 24 (1973): 53.

merge. It is the beginning and the end of all true Trinitarian insights.⁷⁸ As it was mentioned previously, the New Testament believers believed in defended radical monotheism, which was specifically Hebraic. They worshipped and proclaimed the only true God, the God of Israel. They spoke of Yahweh, as the Father (*patros*), the Son (*huios*) using the familiar vocabulary of the Hebrew Scriptures,⁷⁹ and the Holy Spirit (*tó pneúma tó hágion*). Besides, there is not the slightest indication that monotheism underwent some modifications concerning the Godhead.⁸⁰ In short, the New Testament teaches that there is a plurality of persons in the Godhead, that God is both singular and plural at one and the same time.⁸¹

Conclusion

The doctrine of the Trinity, as a theological paradox, embodies and conveys much more than some mysterious notion of “plurality” and “oneness.” By itself the Trinitarian concept is

⁷⁸ Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 494–495; Jerry M. Henry, “Trinity,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1625; Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Wheaton: BridgePoint, 1996), 21–25, 171.

⁷⁹ Christ was credited with the same titles as *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Scriptures: “Lord,” Joel 2:32; Rom 10:9, 13; “The First and the Last,” Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev 2:8; 22:13–16; “I am,” Exod 3:14; John 6:35; 8:12; 9:14; 10:7; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1. Especially noteworthy are: John 8:58, 59; 18:5–6; Mark 14:62.; “The Rock,” Gen 49:24; Pss 18:2; 95:1; 1 Cor 10:4; 1 Pet 2:6–8; “the Bridegroom or Husband,” Hos 2:16, 19; Isa 62:5; 54:5; Jer 3:14; 31:32; Mark 2:19; Matt 25:1–13; “the Shepherd,” Ps 23:1; Ezek 34:11–19; John 10:11; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4; Heb 13:20; “the Judge,” Gen 18:25; Joel 3:12; Matt 25:31–46; Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10. Christ is called “God” in John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; Acts 20:28; Heb. 1:9; 1 John 5:20, etc. See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 619–750.

⁸⁰ Concerning arguments that among the first Christians there was a “redefinition of Jewish monotheism,” see Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 99, 100.

⁸¹ The first self-designation of God, which John repeats with an addition in Rev 21:6, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” were used by God and Christ. (Exod 3:14; John 8:58, etc.). Both God and Jesus identify themselves as “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” See Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, vol. 20, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 87.

absolutely foreign to human mind. For human perception there is always superior and inferior, greater and smaller, a first and second, but that is not the case with the Godhead. The cryptic hints of the Trinity in unity, plurality in oneness, complexity in harmony, occur in the very first verse of the Bible (Gen 1:1), where the term “God” (*'Elōhîm*) is in plural and the verb “created” (*bārā'*) in singular.

Almost the same grammatical constructions and theological conceptions are found in Genesis 1:26, 27, where the plural pronouns “*Us*” and “*Our*” are followed by the two singular nouns with plural possessive pronouns “in Our image” (*bēšalmēnû*) and “according to Our likeness” (*kidmûtēnû*). In the creation story, not only God, but also the Spirit of God (*Rûah 'Elōhîm*) is seen participating in the dynamic process of creation by energizing and vitalizing it (Gen 1:2). The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is no less effective in divine wisdom, knowledge, creative power, or love than the other two members of the Trinity, namely, God the Father and the Second Person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ. All of them are equal in partnership, fellowship, and authority.

If the Hebrew word *'Elōhîm* (God) is unique by itself, as it comprises the notion of the three Persons, then another term “one” (*'ehād*) in Deut 6:4 plays an extremely important role, because not only it qualifies the word *'Elōhîm*, but also helps to understand it in the light of much broader and more complete revelation of the Trinity concept in the New Testament. For instance, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus Himself clarified the word “*'ehād*” by using another term, namely, the singular noun “the name” (*to onoma*). When Jesus commands, “baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” He clearly has in mind the Trinity, which is found at the very heart of the doctrine of God. The term *'ehād* stands for compound unity which is sacred, unique, indefinable, and represents an indivisible God. Another term, “the Lord” (*Yahweh*) designates the personal name of Israel’s

God Who as the only true God is the Originator and Keeper of the covenant.

According to John 1:1, 2, the “Word” (*Logos*) is the Second Person of the Trinity, Christ Jesus, who became incarnate in the fullness of time (John 1:14; Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10). In the context of John 1, there are a number of references to the creation story (John 1:2, 3, 10) which make it clear that what is stated in John 1:1 refers to the words that God spoke during creation week. Psalm 33:6 summarizes it, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.”⁸²

Jiří Moskala points out that the allusions to the Trinity concept are found in the references, which speak about 1) God (*'Elōhîm*), 2) the Spirit of God (*Rûah 'Elōhîm*), and 3) the Word of God (*wayyōmer 'Elōhîm*):⁸³

God (*Elohim*), the Spirit of God (*ruach Elohim*), and the Word of God (*vayomer Elohim*; “and God said”—this significant phrase occurs ten times in the first Creation account, thus pointing to God’s Word) appear together in the Genesis text. In the Prologue to the Gospel according to John, Jesus Christ is directly named as the Word and the Creator (John 1:1-3). In this way all three Persons of the Godhead are alluded to in the Genesis Creation account.

They are interrelated to each other like three drawn equal lines or a triangle in a circle, at the same time they are indistinguishable in motive, inseparable in purpose, and undividable in power. Though monotheism teaches that the three Persons are different in function, they are equal in partnership, authority, and love. The Trinity is not aligned in a hierarchy of authority or importance. Moreover, in our world’s creation and salvation drama, their roles are thoroughly unified and mutually supportive, but clearly varied. One God is comprised of three distinct Beings, three differing forms; they are coauthors in their work of our creation and redemption.

Though the New Testament uses different vocabulary, calling the “Father” (1 Cor 8:6);

⁸² “By the word of the LORD,” in Greek: “*tōi logōi tou Kuriou*” and in Hebrew: “*bidbar YHWH*.”

the “Son” (Heb 1:8–10); and the “Holy Spirit” God (Acts 5:4), the basic meaning is the same. It all is done for our understanding that inspiration ascribes to the Godhead various names. These human categories interpret for us that what each Being of the Trinity does for humanity and individuals specifically, and not how its members relate to one another. Indeed, all the Scriptures are God-centered and God-focused. He is the central character, the main theme, and the Author of the Book.

When, by God’s grace, we are changed to our immortal state, we will throughout eternity study not only the wonders of the physical universe, but also what does it mean to have one God in three Persons, whose basic task is to bring to each one of us absolute conviction and complete conversion through and by His Word.

⁸³ Moskala, “Toward Trinitarian Thinking in the Hebrew Scriptures,” 271.