

Understanding the Trinity, part 3

The Trinity Throughout the Bible

Your Notes

Review—this lesson is part of a series on the Trinity

- ***Understanding the Trinity, part One, The Three Persons of the Trinity***, how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are uncreated, co-equal, and eternal persons.
- ***Understanding the Trinity, part Two, The One Substance of the Trinity***, the attributes shared by the members of the Trinity and what that means to us.
- ***Understanding the Trinity, part Three, The Trinity Throughout the Bible***, descriptions of the Trinity and roles of each member in the Old and New Testaments.
- Notes, videos, podcasts, charts, and associated resource links are all available on www.Bible805.com
- Source materials to teach the lessons, all free, editable, and with no need to attribute them are at www.Bible805Academy.com

Before we get into this lesson, I want to answer a question....

- ***Why does God make things like the Trinity so hard to understand?***
- I've been asked this as I've taught this series.
- Many people wonder about this, and I want to take a minute to address it.
- I think the answer is the same Jesus gave when talking to the Pharisees and they had incorrect ideas about God and the resurrection, when he said....

In Matthew 22:29

- Jesus replied, **"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."**
- Answers to questions about God seem difficult because we simply don't know what the Bible says about important topics.
- It isn't a matter of God attempting to confuse us.
- It is a matter of the priorities of our lives—**the answers are ALL in the Bible, however. . .**
- We usually haven't taken the time needed to read, to study, research, learn, and discuss topics we have questions about.

And it takes TIME to do this

- How to spend time learning about what's most important.
- ***Daily, consistent reading THROUGH the Bible, not just devotionals, is essential.***
- Bible805 has resources for you; *Start Here, a plan for curious people to begin reading the Bible* and *Not Safe, But Good, Why it is important to read your Bible in chronological order and how to do it*. **—whatever plan you use, just read your Bible.**
- Many resources online, sermons, lessons, shorts, commentaries—tune to these instead of wasting time on meaningless or stress-inducing content.
- www.Bible805.com and the Bible805Academy.com have podcasts and videos that will help you know, trust, apply, and teach the Bible.
- Next time you are confused about a Bible truth or have a question, search for the answer.

From the beginning,

the Old Testament talks about the Trinity

- Many are familiar with Gen. 1:1 *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"* where the word "God" is in plural format.

- Hebrew: 'ēlōhîm, plural, masculine noun
- Made, Hebrew *bara*, a singular verb, so we have here, a plurality acting as ONE entity.
- Also with the passage, the same Hebrew word for God “Elohim” is used when it says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.’” Gen.1:26, NLT, where God is clearly a plurality of persons.
- But what about **The Shema**? The defining phrase of the Jewish faith?

Shema – Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deut. 6:4,5

- At first reading it's hard to see any evidence of the Trinity in this verse and many use this verse to deny the existence of the Trinity.
- Let's look more closely at what the verse actually says....
- First, let's dig deeper into the word “one.”

A closer look at the Hebrew for “one” in this verse

- **Hebrew word, *ehad*^{H259}, “one” used in the Shema can be used to contain multiple entities in the oneness that makes them one. As in...**
- Genesis 11:6 And the LORD said, **Behold, the people is one**,^{H259}
- Genesis 34:16 *Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one*^{H259} **people.**
- Genesis 41:25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, **The dream of Pharaoh is one**:^{H259} *God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.*

From the Hebrew word use, we can see

- The word “one” can contain more than one entity—talking about a group of people and Pharaoh's dreams.
- What kind of Oneness could there be with God, if it is not a oneness of person?
- **It is the Oneness of substance, of attributes illustrated in the chart here.**
- It is part of the term *una substantia, tres personae*, meaning **one substance, three persons**, which was clarified by Tertullian in 213 A.D.
- But did the people in the Old Testament have any sense of that, even though by the definitions of the words used, it is clear?

Another word used in the Shema, gives us a hint that they did

- It is the word “God” in the phrase, “the Lord our God, the Lord is one”
- **This is the plural noun “Elohim.”**
- It is the same plural noun that is used in Genesis 1:1, and Genesis 1:26, where it is clearly talking about a plurality of persons—**this is the SAME word used in the Shema!**
- **BUT these 3 places are not the only places the SAME PLURAL WORD “Elohim” used in Genesis.**
- **In fact, used for God 2600 times in the Old Testament.**
- See the *Blue Letter Bible* for the many references
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h430/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

The use of Elohim, the PLURAL word for God is used throughout the Old Testament

- If God is the author of scripture, and we believe He is, in the use of this word, “Elohim” God was consistently communicating something about Himself—

- ***That His “oneness” was not that of a solitary entity, but a plurality of persons, what we know as the Trinity.***
- But who are they? Who are the persons of the Trinity and how are they revealed in the Old Testament?
- To answer, let’s overview the Old Testament to see what it says about God, how it describes His encounters with people.

Challenge at the start—the Bible says

- ***God can’t be seen***
- Exodus 33:20, “*But He [God] said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”*”
- John 1:18, “*No one has seen God at any time.*”
- John 6:46, “*Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.*”
- Clearly both Old and New Testaments tell us that God the Father cannot appear to humans.
- ***But then how do we explain the following verses?***

Where it says God appears to humans?

- “*Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless; (Gen. 17:1).*”
- ***Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day (Genesis 18:1).***
- (After wrestling with God) *Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved (Genesis 32:30).*

And there are more....

- ***Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. . . . as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.”***
Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence. . . . (Joshua 5:13-15).
- *Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, ‘Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face.’ (Judges 6:22).*
- ***Look! he answered, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God (Daniel 3:25).***
- What is going on in these passages, where the Old Testament characters clearly say they SAW God?

Understanding the Trinity, as we previously discussed it, explains it

- If there is a plurality of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, these appearances are of the second person of the Trinity, God the Son.
- In addition to His participation at creation, He appeared at various times in the Old Testament as . . .
- ***What theologians refer to as the “Preincarnate Christ”, meaning this was Jesus, before he was permanently incarnated (enfleshed,) when he was born as a baby in the manger.***
- He is also called **the** Angel of Jehovah or **the** Angel of the Lord in many passages.
- Clarification— angel—is the Hebrew word *mal’āk* meaning a messenger or representative, NOT the current cultural idea of a cute little creature with wings.

- And **THE Angel of the Lord** is God the Father's unique representative, God the Son in His preincarnate form.

This view is shared by many theologians.

The two comments here are from www.preceptautin.org

a great resource site for all Bible studies.

These are two of many entries on "the Angel of the Lord."

- **John F. Walvoord**, highly respected for his exposition of the prophetic sections of the Scriptures and former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, lists these arguments supporting the conclusion that the appearances of the Angel of Jehovah [or Angel of the Lord] represent "*Christophanies*" or visible appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ prior to His incarnation [his arguments are as follows]:
 - The Angel of Jehovah of the Old Testament no longer appears after the incarnation of Christ.
 - Both the Angel of Jehovah and Christ are sent by the Father.
 - The Angel of Jehovah could not be either the Father or the Holy Spirit for the Father and the Spirit are invisible to man.
- **Warren Wiersbe** has this comment: "This person who appeared to [Hagar after she was cast out by Abraham] is the first appearance in Scripture of the Angel of the Lord, who is generally identified as our Lord Jesus Christ. In Genesis 16:10, the angel promised to do what only God can do; and in Genesis 16:13, Hagar called him, the angel, 'God.'"
- Wiersbe goes on: ***These pre-Incarnation visits of Jesus Christ to the earth were to meet special needs and to accomplish special tasks. The fact that the Son of God took on a temporary body, left heaven, and came down to help a rejected servant-girl surely reveals His grace and love.***

We know now who it is who appears to humanity, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity in his pre-incarnate form—

let's now look the God who cannot be seen

- **God the Father, the first person of the Trinity is the One who speaks, decrees, demands, and initiates many of the actions of the Bible—**
- **He is the one who gives messages to the prophets, who then speak God's words to the people**
- *2 Kings 17:13 Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets."*
- *Ezekiel 30:1 the word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy.*

So far, we've seen in the Old Testament

- God the Father, the 1st person of the Trinity is the one who commands, gives the Law, speaks to the prophets who speak to the people, who cannot be seen.
- God the Son, the 2nd person of the Trinity is the pre-incarnate Christ, aka the Angel of the Lord, who takes on human form at significant times in the lives of his chosen people.
- What about the 3rd person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit came on people for specific tasks in the Old Testament

- Numbers 27:18 *And the Lord said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him;*

- *See, I have chosen Bezalel . . . and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills to make artistic designs.* Exodus 31:2-4
- The Spirit guided the prophets: Ezekiel 2:2 *The Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.*
- But He could also be removed, as when Saul disobeyed, the Spirit departed 1 Sam 16:14 *Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul.*

Summary of the Trinity in the Old Testament

- The use of the word Elohim (a plural noun) for God is used over 2600 times and describes both the individual personhood and the united characteristics of the Trinity. Individual passages clarify the work of each member of the Trinity in these ways.
- 1st person of the Trinity, God as Father is Lord of all, though invisible to human eyes, initiates, inspires, speaks, acts.
- 2nd person of the Trinity, God the Son, appeared as the head of the Lord's armies and the Angel of the Lord at specific times and was also looked forward to as the coming Messiah.
- 3rd person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit empowered those chosen by God for holiness and service but was not universally and permanently given to believers as He will be in the New Testament.

Though separate persons, they all work together in significant events in the Old Testament

- Following the Exodus from Egypt, here is how the three persons of the Trinity interacted with the Children of Israel.
- God the Father speaks to the people at Sinai, gives them the law.
- God the Son, the pre-incarnate Jesus is the God Moses speaks to face to face and who appears to Joshua as the Commander of the Lord's armies.
- God the Holy Spirit, inspires and gifts with skills the builders of the Tabernacle in their obedience to God's commands.
- Though not as explicit as in the New Testament (e.g. no passage that spells out what each person of the Trinity is doing as in the Baptism of Jesus), yet, if you are intentionally looking for it, you can clearly see the work of the various members of the Trinity as you read the Old Testament.

Then in the New Testament

- Three persons more clearly seen, a primary example is **in the Baptism of Jesus.**
- Matthew 3:16–17 says, *"When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"*
- Jesus is baptized, the Father speaks, the Spirit descends—all three present, doing different actions, all initiating the ministry of Jesus.

After the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus continued interactions with God the Father and the Holy Spirit

- Jesus was clearly in constant communication with God, His Father as He prayed for healing, for miracles, and simply interacting about everything as he did when he got up early each day to pray.
- The Spirit was also involved, as this passage describes, *Jesus began His ministry in the power of the Spirit. Then Jesus returned in the power of the*

Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region (Luke 4:14 NKJV).

- And at the end of His earthly ministry, the work of the Spirit in Jesus life is described in this way in Rom. 8:11 as *“the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead.”*
- And not only did the Holy Spirit raise Jesus from the dead, but He now has a new relationship with us.

Today, *All Believers*, not just those with a special task to do have a new relationship with the Holy Spirit

- *“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14: 15-17*
- He again promised the Holy Spirit just before his ascension into heaven—
- *On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*
- *……you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*
Acts 1:4-5,8

CLARIFICATION: the Christian’s indwelling by the Holy Spirit is not a “Second Blessing”

- The Holy Spirit is given to ALL believers at the moment of salvation.
- We do not receive the Spirit as a “second blessing” as evidenced by speaking in tongues or laying on of hands or any other action.
- Acts is a historical book, not doctrinal, and many of the many of the events it records are historically accurate, but NOT normative for the church today.
- However, there is a difference between being INDWELT by the Holy Spirit, which every believer is and being FILLED or CONTROLLED by the Holy Spirit, which is a condition based on our obedience.
- **To further clarify, to be “filled with the Spirit” means controlled, empowered by the Holy Spirit**
- *Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. NIV*
- *Don’t drink too much wine, for many evils lie along that path; be filled instead with the Holy Spirit and controlled by him. LB*
- We can limit the Holy Spirit’s power in our life, and we can make Him sad by our behavior.
- *Eph. 4:30 Don’t cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who marks you to be present on that day when salvation from sin will be complete.*

Another important CLARIFICATION

- By saying that the Holy Spirit is given to ALL believers at the moment of salvation and that we do not receive the Spirit as a “second blessing” as evidenced by speaking in tongues or laying on of hands or any other action, does not mean that these gifts or actions are not important or have ceased.
- Though Christians of good will can differ on this, I believe all the gifts of the

Spirit, (tongues, healing, miracles, prophecy, all) are still operative today and distributed as the Spirit wills.

- And just as with the more commonly accepted gifts, such as that of teaching or administration, not everyone gets the same more miraculous or sign gifts, meaning not everyone is given the gift of tongues or healing.
- The theological term for this viewpoint is **continuationist** for someone who believes the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue and the term **cessationist** is used for those who believe the miraculous gifts ceased. And though we can differ, all opinions should be held in loving acceptance of each other.

To review and summarize—about the Trinity and many other biblical truths, God doesn't tell his people everything at once

- But He can be trusted to reveal all that needs to be revealed in its proper time as He did in the progressive revelation of the Trinity.
- **In the Old Testament**, God the Father instructed and cared for His people though He was not seen, His voice was heard, and message communicated through the prophets.
- Jesus assumed human form in special circumstances, though primarily he was looked forward to as Messiah.
- In a similar way the Holy Spirit only came upon special people to equip them for specific tasks and would only be given to all believers after the Messiah's death and resurrection.
- All three persons of the Trinity in their various roles are shown throughout the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, we see the members of the Trinity more fully differentiated

- Jesus (while remaining fully God) became incarnate in human flesh and secured our salvation by His death on the cross.
- Jesus was in constant contact with God the Father asking for His intervention in healing, wisdom, and help in many areas. God the Father was constantly directing Jesus in His ministry.
- The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus for His work and now indwells every believer immediately upon acceptance of Jesus as Savior and comforts, strengthens, and gifts believers for service and spiritual growth.

As the Trinity was progressively revealed, we get to know our Triune God better and better as we walk with Him

- I trust this brief study of the Trinity has helped you better understand your Triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Please download the charts and related materials and share them with others as the Trinity is truly not a doctrine that is difficult to understand or explain—our God wants to be known and has revealed Himself in His Word—we simply need to look at it carefully to understand.
- But as wonderful as this revelation of our Triune God is to us when we study His Word, in reality, it is still “through a glass darkly.”
- Think how much more wonderful it will be when someday, we experience God the Father and the Spirit more fully and when we see our Savior face to face.
- Then we will begin to truly understand the Trinity, though through all eternity we'll never grasp the fullness of it.

DISCUSSION GUIDE for Understanding the Trinity, Part Three: The Trinity Throughout the Bible

Brief Lesson Summary

This lesson traces the revelation of the Trinity throughout the Old and New Testaments. It shows how God progressively revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, explains the roles of each Person in Scripture, and encourages believers to know God more deeply through careful study of the Bible.

Ice-breaker Question

Has there ever been a Bible truth that became much clearer after you spent time studying it? What made the difference?

1. Why is consistent reading and study of the Bible essential for understanding difficult biblical topics like the Trinity?
2. What Old Testament passages most impressed you in showing evidence of the Trinity before the New Testament?
3. How does understanding the pre-incarnate appearances of Christ deepen your appreciation for Jesus' work throughout Scripture?
4. What differences do you see between the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and His ministry in believers today?
5. Why is it important to understand both the unity and the distinct roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

6. How has this three-part study changed your understanding of God, and what truth do you most want to remember?

Life Application Suggestions, consider and respond

1. Commit to reading through the entire Bible so you can see how God's plan unfolds from Genesis to Revelation.
 2. Spend time thanking the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for their distinct yet united work in your salvation and daily life.
 3. When questions arise about your faith, make searching the Bible your first response before accepting popular opinions.
 4. Share one truth you learned about the Trinity with a friend or family member this week.
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Prayer Focus

Thank God for revealing Himself through His Word and for making it possible to know Him personally. Pray for a lifelong desire to study the Bible faithfully, to grow in your relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to faithfully share biblical truth with others.