

# **Doctrine of the Trinity**

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## **Introduction**

The Doctrine of the Trinity is not at all understood by non-Christians and is often poorly understood by the majority of Christians, and that is a shame. Such a lack of knowledge about so basic a subject that is vital to Christianity is an indictment of the major faiths and their failure to equip the saints for service in God's Kingdom.

Most denominations today give their members exactly what they want. Sadly, many churchgoers are just that — only churchgoers and not believers, much less mature believers. Such "Christians" will be satisfied with a five-minute homily or a fifteen-minute sermon. That means they know little of God's plan and His expectations of man. However, for those who are truly saved, Sunday isn't enough! They want Bible classes during the week as well.

## **Common Roots**

Three major religions share a common ancestry. They are Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. All three claim Abraham as their spiritual earthly father. All three claim their system of worship is monotheistic (one god). All three reject idolatry, the worship of other gods or possessions that become like gods to us. However, Christianity is accused of idolatry by the other two because of our doctrine of the Trinity. They see this as worshiping three gods. This is further aggravated by the practice of Catholics worshiping and praying to numerous and sundry "saints." Sorry, but that is indeed idolatry.

Modern rabbinical Judaism is deeply offended by the concept of the Trinity. It is further offended by the very idea that God could ever become a man. For them, the Trinity is the worst kind of idolatry, since it seems to bring God down to the level of mankind and introduces the worship of a man. To the Jew, we Christians appear to be worshiping three Gods.

Before this study is complete, I intend to prove that the Trinity is found not only in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament. I will do so with the help of a study by Rabbi Joseph Azriel of the Christian/Jew Foundation. Rabbi Joseph demonstrated, from Scripture, that the Trinity is found in the Old Testament (OT). Furthermore, such a belief was not foreign to first-century Jews.

The Pharisees of Jesus' time had perverted Mosaic Judaism. On to what God had given through Moses, they heaped rabbinical teachings, traditions, and interpretations, turning the Law into a burden. That version of Judaism has survived and is still with us today. But back in history, we can find the true, God-given truths under which Moses led a nation out of the darkness of bondage and into the light of the truth. They lost these truths! And because they did, they were destroyed as a nation, exactly as Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 28.

Had they not lost the truth and slipped into apostasy, Christians today might have been called Jews. Israel was not spiritually prepared for the Messiah and the promised Kingdom, and they rejected their promised Messiah when He showed up. Israel was looking for the "kick-butt" Messiah rather than the suffering Messiah.

Before He could establish the Kingdom, sin had to be dealt with. The blood offerings of the Levitical system only temporarily "hid" sins until they could be judged. The Law could neither save nor fully satisfy the righteousness of God. Their rigorous Law-keeping kept them from recognizing this. Thus, their idea of Messiah was not a suffering Messiah come to deal with sin but a victorious one. come to establish the Kingdom by force if necessary.

Even if they had received Jesus as Messiah, He still would have had to go to the Cross to deal with the sin problem, but He would have returned soon. Rome would have been vanquished, and the Millennium would have begun two thousand years ago — and we today would never have been born, because time would be over by now. But it didn't happen that way. Israel rejected their Messiah and killed Him. But God was not in the least surprised by that.

The Jew today is under judicial blindness and, nationally, cannot see the truth, but many individual Jews do see the truth and turn to Yeshua as Messiah.

**Matthew 13:14** Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “ ‘ “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” <sup>15</sup> For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’

**John 12:40** “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. <sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

John is referring to an Isaiah prophecy that Israel would reject the Messiah. But with this understanding, it must be stated that Judaism and Christianity are absolutely inseparable and, in their true and original forms, are one and the same system of worship.

## What is the Trinity?

The first challenge of this study is to define what we mean by the term “Trinity.” You will not find the word in the Bible because it is a theological term created to describe a doctrine.

The Trinity, or “Triune Godhead,” is not three Gods, so it is not idolatry. It is also not three manifestations of one god. Well, what is it then?

**The Trinity is three persons sharing one common essence.**

This does not mean there are “three Gods in one,” but that **one God exists in three persons** — co-equal, co-infinite, and co-eternal – **all three possessing the same essential nature.**

Without demeaning the Godhead, in human terms, it can be likened to three people sharing one perfect brain. **The three people act in complete unity and harmony because they share the exact same thoughts and values. They are three distinct beings sharing a common essence.**

Note that I said all three are co-eternal. That means all three existed in eternity past. In other words, the Second Person (the Son) did not come into being two thousand years ago but existed before then. What happened two thousand years ago was that **the humanity of Christ came into being.** The Son pre-existed Mary in eternity past; therefore, Mary cannot be the "mother of God." Since such a title places Mary in a position antecedent to God, which is not possible, it is a gross error to refer to Mary by such a title.

Each person of the Godhead has a purpose or role related to God's eternal will and plan. These roles are not shared with the other members of the Trinity.

- **The Father** is the planner, the source of all things.
- **The Son** is the agent through whom the Father's plan is enacted.
- **The Holy Spirit** is the revealer of the plan and the one who empowers it in our lives.

Our understanding of the Trinity shapes our Christology, the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our understanding of the Holy Spirit shapes our concept of the Christian way of life. Our worship and spirituality are possible only with a biblical perspective of the Godhead. In other words, an understanding of the Trinity is essential to a maturing relationship with God.

As previously mentioned, the term "Trinity" is not found in Scripture, but the doctrines that make up the doctrine of the Trinity are indeed found in Scripture. Satan was at work even in the early days of the Church, attempting to distort and pervert the truths of what had just occurred at the Cross and in the days, months, and years that followed.

The earliest Christians were Jewish believers known as "N'tzrim" or "Nazarenes" (Matthew 2:23; Mark 14:67; 16:6; Acts 24:5) because Jesus was from Nazareth. Their leader was "Ya'akov ha Tzaddik," or James the Just, sometimes called "James the Less." This James was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus and is believed to be the author of the Book of James. The Nazarenes believed in the virgin birth and in Jesus' identity as the incarnate Son of God. They also affirmed the divine authority of the New Testament, including the four Gospels and the epistles of Paul.

Another group opposed the Nazarenes. They were the Ebionites, who believed in the messiahship of Jesus but rejected His deity. They also rejected Paul's writings and other parts of the New Testament (NT). Other splinter groups emerged over the next few hundred years. As a result, the nature and personality of the Godhead became a significant doctrinal issue. The controversy centered not only on the person of Yeshua but also on the person of "Ruach ha Kodesh," the Holy Spirit.

Anti-trinitarians often point out that the Council of Nicaea formalized and defined the doctrine of divine tri-unity in AD 325. To them, this means the Trinity did not exist before then. This is illogical, since "omnipotence" is not mentioned in Scripture, but the doctrine of omnipotence certainly is. The Trinity existed long before the word or definition did.

The word "**Trinity**" is merely a label for the concept that the **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God in one essence**. The Bible teaches the reality of each member of the Trinity as God without ever using the term. OK, where?

## **The Father is God**

**Matthew 6:9** Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

**1 Corinthians 1:3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 8:6** for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

## The Son is God

**John 8:58** Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

**Hebrews 1:3** He (Jesus) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

## The Holy Spirit is God

**Genesis 1:2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

**Numbers 11:29** But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

**Acts 5:3** But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?”

**2 Corinthians 3:17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

**Ephesians 4:30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

The Scriptures are very specific in ascribing deity to all Three Persons of the Godhead. The teaching of the Triune Godhead is both right and Biblical.

Anti-trinitarians argue that the Roman Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea as part of a strategy to foist a corrupt version of the Christian faith on the masses. He and his underlings were anxious to find a

"glue" to hold the diverse Roman Empire together, and perhaps this Middle Eastern religion of Jesus could solve that problem.

What really happened was that the church was rapidly spreading the Gospel to pagan tribes. Conversion to Christianity often meant that the chief of a tribe was converted, usually after he was simply defeated in battle. When he was baptized, every other member of his tribe was baptized as well. This happened whether or not they expressed saving faith in Christ's work. Kind of "let's dip them all and let God sort them out."

These newly "converted Christians" came from cultures that celebrated many gods and lesser gods. They were accustomed to worshipping male and female deities and their offspring. This soon led to the elevation of Mary's status and her becoming the object of veneration.

Icons and idols were common in the heathen religions from which these new "Christians" came, and they were uncomfortable without a visible representation of their new God. It became acceptable to place icons depicting notable figures from Church history in Christian churches of the time. It wasn't long before these icons became recipients of prayers and objects of worship.

Did Constantine encourage this for his own purposes? Perhaps. The new Church was barely 300 years old, and Satan had already introduced idolatry into its practices, just as he had done with Judaism. Is it any wonder the Jews believe Christians are involved in idolatry?

Ironically, as the church began its downward spiral into idolatry, it also declared the truth of the Trinity. The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) declared the Son to have the same nature as the Father. The Council of Constantinople (AD 381) asserted the deity of the Holy Spirit. In the intervening centuries, "Trinity" became a technical word for the three persons of the Godhead.

### **Points to remember:**

- The Trinity is **not** three separate gods co-ruling.
- The Trinity is **not** three manifestations of one God.
- The Trinity **is** three persons sharing one common essence.
- Each person of the Godhead has a purpose or role related to God's eternal will and plan.

- The members of the Trinity do not share these roles jointly.
- The Father is the planner, the source of all things.
- The Son is the agent through whom the Father's plan is enacted.
- The Holy Spirit is the revealer of the plan and the one who empowers it in our lives.
- The short version:
  - **The Father wrote the plan**
  - **The Son executes the plan**
  - **The Holy Spirit reveals the plan.**

## **Is the Trinity Strictly New Testament?**

It is claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is strictly a Christian doctrine and appears only in the New Testament. We will examine NT support for the Trinity in due course, but first, we will establish that it is indeed found in the OT.

Traditional Jewish teaching holds that the Messiah will be a mortal man born in the normal way. He is not divine, and there's no virgin birth, according to the rabbis. Yet the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, is full of attestations to the Messiah's divinity.

Some sects of Judaism say that a messiah is born in every generation, and the behavior of the Jewish people determines whether he will reveal himself. The reason the Messiah has not come yet is that no Jewish generation has proved itself sufficiently worthy to receive him.

Because the fullness of divine revelation had not yet come and would not until the Canon of Scripture closed with John's penning of Revelation around AD 90, teachings concerning the Messiah were more implicit than explicit in the OT.

Throughout human history, God has progressively revealed Himself and His plan. Adam and Eve knew very little about the coming redeemer, but, obviously, Eve understood the doctrine well enough to initially believe that Cain was the promised deliverer.

**Genesis 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD**

This was in reference to a curse placed on Satan because of his deception of the woman and Adam in the Garden, as found earlier in Genesis.

**Genesis 3:14** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Eve was looking for the offspring who would “bruise” Satan’s head. She thought Cain was that one, but he wasn’t.

God reveals His plan progressively, and as the centuries have passed, more and more has been revealed. From Genesis to Revelation, God reveals Himself systematically, page after page, precept upon precept, layer by layer, moving from the simple to the more complex. God revealed many details about the Messiah in the OT. Israel had been given enough information to recognize Jesus as the long-promised Messiah and to affirm His deity.

Some Jews recognized Him and became His followers, but most did not. Some of those who believed Jesus was the Messiah were Pharisees, the most knowledgeable in all of Israel. To them, Jesus met the requirements set forth in the OT for the Messiah. Were men like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathaea, and Saul, three Pharisees, men learned in the Scriptures, all deceived? If they understood Scripture, how could they say Jesus met the requirements for the Messiah if He did not?

Well over 200 Old Testament passages provide very specific details about the life and death of Jesus and should have helped Israel identify Him not only as the Messiah but also as God. We will spend time looking at some of those passages in detail later. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is also very clearly mentioned in the OT, and we will look at some of those passages later.

No less an authority than the prophet Isaiah affirms the deity of the Messiah.

**Isaiah 9:6** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,

on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (*Emphasis added*)

Isaiah describes the coming Kingdom and its everlasting nature. This passage is unquestionably Messianic because it points to the Messianic Kingdom, its righteous government, and, more specifically, the Throne of David. Isaiah says He will be called God. The title given by Isaiah, "Mighty God," is "*el gibbor*" in Hebrew. The term "*el*" can be translated as "god" rather than "the God," but it appears five other times in the OT and elsewhere refers to the One True God, as it does here in Isaiah.

Nothing belonging to man can be everlasting; only God's Kingdom is everlasting. If the king is only human, his kingdom will come to an end.

In response to the Jewish argument that "a child is born" in this passage refers to Hezekiah, it should be noted that Hezekiah had already been born by the time this was written. The word translated as "child" is *yeled* and can be rendered as boy, child, fruit, son, or young man. But "son," without any additional adjectives, can mean nothing else than the Son of God and references several OT passages.

**2 Samuel 7:13** He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men

This passage speaks of the Davidic Covenant and God's promise to David that the Messiah will be of his direct line. Note the wording, "He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son..." This is not David's son Solomon. "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Solomon's throne did not last forever. This is the Son of David who will come much later as the Messiah.

Isaiah also alludes to Psalm 2:7, which says, "The LORD said to me, You are my Son; today I have begotten you." David speaks of the Kingdom (Millennium). Had it not been widely known that the Messiah would be the

Son of God, it would have been foolish and meaningless for Isaiah simply to call him "my Son."

David knew Messiah would be God. Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted Messianic prophecy in the New Testament. It appears in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 1 Corinthians, and many places in Hebrews. It is quoted as finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Jews, of course, reject this, but let's take a look at Psalm 110 and see for ourselves.

**Psalm 110:1** The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." <sup>2</sup> The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! <sup>3</sup> Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. <sup>4</sup> The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

<sup>5</sup> The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. <sup>6</sup> He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth. <sup>7</sup> He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore, he will lift up his head.

If it can be discredited, it must be shown that Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others misinterpreted Psalm 110. On the other hand, if it can be shown that this Psalm is indeed Messianic, it becomes one of the most powerful passages in the Bible regarding the Messiahship, priesthood, and deity of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 110 is a psalm written by David and is most interesting for the terms David uses, terms that are confounding to the Jews, as we shall see.

In verse 1, the LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." The first question to answer is who David's "lord" is in the passage, "The LORD says to my Lord...." Rabbinical teaching holds that David's "lord" is Abraham, referring to Abraham's victory over Chedorlaomer and the kings allied with him (Gen 14:1-17). If this is correct, the word translated "lord" should be lowercase, since it does not refer to a deity. This hinges on the translation of the Hebrew word from which we get "Lord." The first "LORD" is the sacred Tetragrammaton (YHWH), God's name, Jehovah or Yahweh, depending on where the vowel points are placed. Jews never pronounce or utter the name of the Lord. In

fact, we are not even sure how to pronounce YHWH. They often added the vowel points for *adon* as a signal to use the term "Lord" instead of saying God's name. From this practice, we get the modern pronunciation of "Jehovah."

When you see "LORD" in your Bible spelled in all caps, you should know that it represents the sacred Tetragrammaton, YHWH. The second "lord" that David calls "my lord" is *adon*. The addition of the "ee" sound, *yod*, makes it possessive — "my Lord" or "my Master." The Jews allege that this word, *adonee* or *adonai*, in the plural means "master" or "sir" and never refers to deity. That isn't entirely correct. In Isaiah, we have numerous uses of *HaAdon YHWH*, which means "Lord God" and refers, of course, to The One True God. Micah 4:13 and Malachi also use *Adon* to refer to God.

In Matthew 22, Jesus challenges the Pharisees with this passage from the Psalms.

**Matthew 22:41** Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, <sup>42</sup> saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." <sup>43</sup> He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, <sup>44</sup> " 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet" ' ? <sup>45</sup> If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" <sup>46</sup> And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Jesus is clearly referring to Psalm 110, which he regarded as a Messianic prophecy. Furthermore, there is evidence that the Pharisees of Jesus' day recognized Psalm 110 as Messianic, even if they did not at that time recognize the second "Lord" as Messiah.

The Pharisees answered His first question right away, confirming their understanding of the "Son of David" as a title for the Messiah. But Jesus stumped them with the second question, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, <sup>44</sup> 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?"' If David calls him Lord, how is he also David's son?"

If this second "Lord" in Psalm 110 is translated with a lowercase "l," the fact remains that a man would not ordinarily refer to his son as "lord." For example, under Hebrew culture and protocol, Solomon would refer to his father, David, as "lord" because David was both his father and his king, but David would not call his son Solomon "lord." This second "lord" in Psalm 110 can be David's son and his "Lord" at the same time only if it is translated with a capital "L" and refers to the Messiah as the Son of David. David could call his "son" *Adon* (Lord) because he was no mere man; He would be the God-man, Jesus Christ, born of a human mother and God, worthy of being called his Lord.

The rabbis say Psalm 110 is wrong because they reject the idea that the Messiah is divine. The Midrash Rabbah gives the Messiah the title "LORD" (YHWH). Jesus reminded the Pharisees that David spoke "by the Spirit," thereby giving the passage the authority of divine revelation. Note that the Pharisees did not dispute that point.

The Bible is a supernatural book. Every detail in the text is there for a reason. Contrary to Jewish rabbinical teaching, the name *Adon* does not exclude God as the subject. There is no good reason not to translate *Adon* here as "Lord" with a capital "L," signifying that David was indeed referring to the deity. All the evidence points to "Lord" as the correct translation.

That being the case, when David spoke of the Messiah in Psalm 110, he understood that the Messiah would be more than a mere man and would be God. The language of this Psalm points to that fact. When it is added to the many other references to the Messiah's deity, it becomes unarguable.

### **To be Continued ...**

Next session, we will continue our study of Psalm 110 and see more of the interesting things David wrote for us there.